

jan 84

Bisexuality: A Decade Ago

[We thought it would be interesting to look back a decade. As you will see from the following articles, the issues never really change.]

BISEXUAL CHIC: ANYONE GOES

[Newsweek, May 1974]

There is a new vibration to spring this year. While the birds and the bees are striking up their vernal hum, so are the boys and the girls, the boys and the boys, and the girls and the girls. Bisexuality is in bloom.

On some college campuses, prom queens are dancing with other prom queens while their kings are smoothing on eye shadow in the men's room. In the May issue of *Vogue*, an intertwined trio of two lads and a lass caress each other through a six-page display of swim wear, while in *Glamour*, a Mary Quant cosmetics ad features a poutingly pretty boy and girl in matching glitter make-up.

The news media have become a confessional for celebrities who are rushing out of their closets to join the new cult of bisexual chic. "One of the nicest--whatever you want to call it--loves of my life was a woman," confided folk heroine Joan Baez in an interview last year.

It was probably inevitable. As his-and-her clothes, hair styles and role assignments blurred the line between the sexes until they overlapped, the only thing left to swap was sex itself. Homosexuals have become so accepted in some circles that the American Psychiatric Association recently decided to drop homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses--though most therapists continue to treat it as a disorder. In the women's liberation movement, some politicized sisters have been establishing lesbian relationships, which they see as almost obligatory.

Shift: Not suprisingly, students who passed through puberty watching rock star Mick Jagger sing love songs to his drummer are pushing harder at the perimeters of sexuality. "All my friends are into it,"

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BISEXUALITY: WHERE LOVE SPEAKS LOUDER THAN LABELS [Ms. Magazine, 1974, by Pepper Schwartz & Philip Blumstein]

"I am not a heterosexual but I'm not lesbian either. I am one of those strange creatures, a bisexual. No one believes I exist."

Because very few people know much about bisexuality, we interviewed 150 people who had had sexual experiences with both.

Bisexuals are caught in the middle. Both gays and straights may distrust them for being fence sitters. Some heterosexuals are threatened by homosexuality in any form, and some homosexuals are threatened by those who don't make a total commitment to the gay cause. The media have picked up on people who choose lovers of both sexes for the sheer fashion of it, and describe them as bisexual chic, either silly or exploitative. The general feeling seems to be that no one can really be attracted to men and women in the same way. Certainly not for very long, anyway.

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Editorial

We the editors of the newsletter you see before you wanted to take time out in this "editorial" to explain what we did for this issue and how we did it. We think we have set up a process and a format that is both appealing and workable.

At the last Coordinating Committee meeting, we volunteered to "co-facilitate" this issue. At subsequent meetings with interested network women, we brought together our different perspectives and skills to create a structure for production that seemed equitable and realistic, and a format for material that would serve all our interests. We saw the newsletter as a vehicle for sharing ideas, feelings, topics of interest, announcements and network news. Ultimately, we envisioned a collection of news items and stories--your stories. A forum for letters and articles concerning both bisexual-related themes and other topics of interest to women. A space in which to raise issues, questions and concerns, and promote dialogue. A way to develop and strengthen connections.

We divided the newsletter into different sections or "departments" according to areas of interest. Since many people felt that their support groups were a critical part of their network experience, we created SUPPORT GROUP NEWS as a place to put group announcements and exchange topics. THE READERS FORUM would provide a space for network women to express their

BISEXUALITY: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT [Redbook, 1974, by Margaret Mead]

The time has come, I think, when we must recognize bisexuality as a normal form of human behavior.

The whole question of sexual preference has for so long been taboo in our and most other Western societies that the subject of bisexuality has seldom been raised or, until very recently, frankly and openly discussed. The idea that a woman--or a man--is capable of loving members of both sexes simply does not occur to most people.

What the men and women in the Gay Movement are now demanding is that we break through our prejudices and recognize their adult right to their own chosen social identity. But there is not, and it seems unlikely that there will be, a bisexual liberation movement. For the truth is, bisexual men and women do not form a distinct group,

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concerns without feeling pressured to write a full article, and to invite response on particular issues. Although we received limited feedback to our CLASSIFIED and ANNOUNCEMENT sections, we hope that these will be more fully used in future issues. DISPLAY ADS for this issue cost \$5.00. Ad policy at present is still tentative and under formulation. The COORDINATING COMMITTEE notes should catch everyone up on the decision-making process of the network--where we are going and what choices we have made as an organization.

To solicit materials for these departments, we sent flyers or called everyone on the network mailing list. Response was a bit disappointing, but we hope that for the next newsletter, and the issues to follow, everyone will feel free to include their thoughts and feelings. This is YOUR newsletter. You should use it!

As editors, we have enjoyed participating in the creation of this issue of the BBWN news, and want to thank everyone who helped out. What we have done is in no way written in stone, and we welcome comments, criticism, complaints and especially praise for our efforts. Although we will not necessarily be working on the next issue we will be suggesting that the structure of the next issue and the organization of its production remain relatively the same, in a proposal to be presented at the next Coordinating Committee meeting on February 5.

Yours in struggle,

Stephanie L.
Barbara H.

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The READERS FORUM

In response to our request for reader contributions we received several letters we thought other readers might like to respond to. We welcome your reactions, however brief, to the letters published here, and invite you to write letters regarding any issue you would like to comment on or ask for other reader opinions.

Dear BBWN Newsletter:

I recently had a confrontation with a good friend who is a lesbian, and has been uneasy about my bisexuality ever since I proclaimed it as such after joining the network. Her arguments against the status of my identity as a bisexual and the currents of hostility I felt rumbling just below the surface were deeply disturbing. She acted as if I had hurt or threatened her feelings in some illicit way, and to retaliate she hurt me back explicitly, with barbed comments and stinging observations about my character.

I told her that I was in love with a man at present, but that I felt myself "gay-identified" in that I had slept with women in the past, would probably do so again in the future and my social/political sympathies lay with the lesbian community. She told me I was a heterosexual who thought it was "cool" to be gay. I told her I felt bisexuality was an accurate way to describe my feelings, and sexuality and that I was relieved once I had found the network. She told me that she had been a bisexual once, but that she decided for her it was too morally, sexually and politically ambiguous a position. Further, that she felt that there was in reality no such thing as a "bisexual", but instead there were people passing through phases, some of which they never leave for their whole lives.

In all of this you will detect the classic pattern. Consistently, I felt that I was being negated, that what I was did not, in fact, exist, or only existed as some part of another identity I was on my way to or returning from. She gave me no credit for the years of soul-searching I went through to try and find some peace of mind and happiness with my own inability to choose exclusively between men and women. Further, she showed me a disturbingly angry side of her, a threatened side. And what is more, an arrogant side. Although I know I have made the right decision, I grieve that my ability to "find myself" and be happy with a bisexual identity has alienated, rather than enhanced, a friendship.

In struggle,

BW

Dear Friends,

I would like to share with you an incredible experience, attending the December 3-4 workshop given by Ellen Bass for survivors (not victims, survivors!) of childhood sexual abuse. For two days seventeen women survivors shared their stories, their fears, and their triumphs in an atmosphere of total support and trust. Some of us had never shared our story with anyone but a therapist before. For many of us, the memories of abuse have resurfaced only very recently. So much grief filled the living room we were packed into, but along with the grief, so much strength. In writing about our experiences and reading aloud what we had written, we were again the children to whom things happened that should not happen to any child. As adults, we can begin to speak about what has remained silent for so long, to believe that it is not we who are to blame, to reach out to other survivors and children who are in danger now, and to let it be known that the sexual abuse

of children is far more prevalent than most people believe. (A recent study says that one out of four women has experienced some form of sexual abuse as a child!)

A common theme during the workshop was the denial of family, friends or therapists who insist that it did not happen (you're making it up) or that it's not that important (why are you torturing yourself with this stuff?). One therapist said "Just forget it and get on with your life." But we really get on with our lives only as we reclaim all of what makes us who we are, acknowledge the importance of even the most painful experiences, and realize the strength that comes from looking squarely at what we have survived.

Jean

Dear Reader's forum:

At a gay New Year's Eve party, I talked with a man in a red bow-tie. When I told him I was bisexual, along with my history and my reasons for it, he snidely commented, "Well, that seems to be the thing this year."

With that one sentence he dismissed everything I'd said, casting me into a convenient pigeonhole, like so many people, both gay and straight, are doing to avoid the issue of bisexuality.

I promptly retrieved my bottle of champagne from the fridge and left, party-pooping but proud.

P.P.

Dear Sisters,

I would like to take an informal survey: if you have ever been in any kind of therapy, how has your therapist reacted to the issue of bisexuality? I have had male therapists who didn't take my attractions to women seriously (they couldn't believe I am gay if they found me attractive?). One even encouraged me to be more careful about how I fantasized so I wouldn't be conditioning myself to prefer women! Then there's the woman therapist who kept referring to "the direction you're going," i.e. towards women, as if bisexuality is a road between two places rather than a place all by itself. I would be very curious to know what responses others of you have had from therapists.

JW

TELEPHONE (617) 498-9923

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cartoon

by Barb

"HEY, LOVER, I'M OFF TO MY FIRST
BISEXUAL NETWORK MEETING."

WHAT'S
THIS?

REMEMBER I TOLD YOU I HAD FINALLY FOUND
A GROUP OF WOMEN WITH WHOM I
COULD EXPLORE THE MEANING OF MY PAST
RELATIONSHIPS + SEXUAL ATTRACTION TO
WOMEN WHILE AT THE SAME TIME
PURGING MY GUILT FOR BEING
POLITICALLY
INCORRECT BY
FALLING IN
LOVE WITH A
MAN + BEING
CALLED HETERO
WHEN I AM
IN REALITY A
GAY-IDENTIFIED
BISEXUAL?

BYE.

WHY COULDN'T SHE
HAVE JOINED A
BOWLING LEAGUE,
LIKE OTHER
WOMEN?

Announcements and Meetings

HARTFORD CONFERENCE ON BISEXUALITY MARCH 17

There will be a one-day conference in Hartford including workshops, panel discussions, and entertainment. The format is small group discussions with larger group sharings. Housing will be available. Watch for more information on times, cost, and location. Place to be announced. Planning Meeting for Conference--February 5, 1:00, Hartford. If you're interested in planning, facilitating small group discussions, or would like to share writing/poetry, please attend this meeting. Call Norman between 6-10pm, at 247-3047.

BISEXUAL MEN'S GROUP

This group has met two times and was started from an ad in GCN. There are presently 7 members of varied backgrounds, some previously married, others gay-identified involved with women, and some straight, now exploring their sexuality. The group is closed for now; but future meetings are scheduled and will be advertised. The group is working on formulating a structure and hopes to develop into a more intimate support group and friendship network. Focus of discussions has been the impact of a bisexual identity on relationships, and how a bisexual lifestyle can be realized.

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confides Sharon, a pre-sex junior at a Los Angeles high school. The sexual shift was more traumatic for Sue McGovern, a 19-year-old Vassar sophomore who came at it from the other side. After four years of lesbian relationships, the avid feminist recently proclaimed her bisexuality by taking up with a man. "Coming out into the straight world blew my mind," she says. "But everybody does bisexuality now. It's really big."

Despite the ruling of its official representatives, the psychiatric community is far from phlegmatic about anyone-goes sex. "Bisexuality is a disaster for culture and society," claims Dr. Charles Socarides, a New York psychiatrist. "They're selling a phony sexual utopia in which the kingdom of the orgasm will supposedly replace the house of the ego." But other psychiatrists like Dr. Judd Marmor, president-elect of the American Psychiatric Association, take exception to such blanket condemnations. "It is getting to the point," he says, "where heterosexuality can be viewed as a hangup. The new bisexual consciousness, besides being viewed as a rebellion against puritanism, may also be conveying a feeling of universality among men and women."

Race: But the bisexual beat goes on. Hot-blooded rock groupies let go at Max's Kansas City in New York, where a male model named Cyrk appears in androgynous attire and boasts: "We're the new race. I'm somewhere else and in between."

NEXT GENERAL MEETING January 25, 7:30pm, 186 Hampshire St., Cambridge, in the bookstore basement. Topic: Choosing Bisexuality as an Identity.

SPRING MEETING March 21, 7:30 pm, place to be announced. Topic: Bisexuality and Commitments in Relationships.

THE BOSTON CHAPTER OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN IN PSYCHOLOGY: Conference on Issues in the Psychology of Women: **LESBIAN PSYCHOLOGIES**

At the Park Plaza in Boston from March 9-11, 1984. For registration materials, write: Registration Committee, B.A.W.P., P.O. Box 1267, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. Childcare available.

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Most people think that a person gets a fixed sexual orientation early in life and keeps it forever, like a birthmark. The truth is that sexual identity--a feeling that one is straight, gay or bisexual--can be amazingly flexible. A woman may have male and female lovers, at the same time or in sequence, and not consider herself bisexual. She may have no homosexual experiences, but fantasizes about them or thinks she should have them. She may consider herself straight, but enjoy sex with other women. She may consider herself gay, but take male lovers. Sexual identity, therefore, doesn't rest exclusively on sexual behavior. What people say they are may be entirely different from what they do.

Many people are extremely uncomfortable about the "AC/DC" idea of sexual flexibility--the fact that sexual preferences can change several times in the course of a lifetime. Some are uncomfortable unless they have a secure label, the certainty that they are "homosexual" or "heterosexual." Others feel certain about themselves, but uncomfortable about other people's bisexuality. As one lesbian told us, "I don't trust anyone who calls herself bisexual. I'm tired of being someone's big night. I love women and that means I want someone who can love me. I don't want someone using me to shine up her feminist credentials. I don't want to get hurt."

At present, it is still easier to be exclusively heterosexual, but even being exclusively homosexual is easier than both. The bisexual often feels trapped between needing to hide homosexuality from straight friends and family, and assuring gay friends that she or he is serious about homosexual commitments. Some gays and straights, for their part, find themselves pressured to believe that bi is better. But as people learn that sexual preference is not necessarily imprinted forever, perhaps we'll be able to do what we want, with whom we want, without feeling coerced or constrained.

SPRING AFFAIR WEEKEND IN NEW YORK CITY

To see Torch Song Trilogy and/or La Cage Aux Folles. Balcony seats only for La Cage (\$10). Tickets for Torch Song Trilogy range from \$19.50-\$32.50. Bus fare and hotel approx. \$70/pp. If minimum of 25 people, we can charter a bus and save between \$7-11/pp (also can get group rates on hotel). Anyone interested? Contact Stephanie at 232-9089, after 6pm.

Notice

UNFORTUNATELY...

We don't have the manpower to answer personal letters mailed to the network unless they're queries about items for the newsletter. We do appreciate "Letters to the Editor" and "Reader's Forum". Typed and double spaced!

CONTINUED FROM PG 1

since in fact we do not really recognize bisexuality as a form of behavior, normal or abnormal, in our society.

Instead, we tend to divide people into two groups, each the mirror of each other.

Vaguely, however, we do recognize the existence of men and women who unfortunately, as we see it, fall in love with a homosexual of the opposite sex. It is by putting the devoted companions of many homosexuals into this indistinct third category that we explain to ourselves that homosexuals often are married and the fathers--or mothers--of children. These we tend to believe are not "real" homosexuals. This is a belief that follows along naturally enough from our cultural belief that homosexuals are heterosexuals in reverse--people who, like ourselves, are committed to loving members of only one sex but differing from the majority in the fact that their commitment is to members of their own sex.

Changing traditional attitudes toward homosexuality is in itself a mind-expanding experience for most people. But we shall not really succeed in discarding the strait jacket of our cultural beliefs if we fail to come to terms with the well-documented, normal human capacity to love members of both sexes.

What is new is not bisexuality, but rather the widening of our awareness and acceptance of human capacities for sexual love.

Today the recognition of bisexuality, in oneself and in others, is part of the whole mid-20th century movement to accord to each individual, regardless of race, class, nationality, age or sex, the right to be a person who is unique and who has a social identity that is worthy of dignity and respect.

COMMITTEE NOTES

Minutes of the Coordinating Committee Meeting, November 20, 1983:

Topics and dates for the next two general meetings were decided:

Wednesday, January 25 at 7:30 pm--"Choosing Bisexuality as an Identity"; Wednesday, March 21 at 7:30 pm--"Bisexuality and Commitment in Relationships."

Stephanie L. and Barb H. would coordinate the next newsletter. Alice G. volunteered to correspond with "isolated" members of the Network who cannot come out to regular meetings. It was decided that the Network ought to have an "archivist." It was also pointed out that Radcliffe's Schlesinger Library contains a bisexual archive. A holiday social was planned for December 16th at Barb's house. A total of \$50 in contributions was collected at this meeting.

For people who have agenda items they wish to see discussed at the next Coordinating Committee Meeting, please send your suggestions to Megan M., BBWN, P.O. Box 1534, Jamaica Plain, 02130

support group NEWS

There are currently 8 (known) support groups in the network. If you are not presently in a group but want to join one, you can find other interested people at the next general meeting or put a notice, in the next newsletter. We didn't receive any letters from you for this section. Help us keep this part of the newsletter alive by sending information, topics or experiences, for the next issue.

CLASSIFIEDS

Roommate wanted. Temporarily. Number of months negotiable. Clean apartment with personable and open female in Boston. \$175 all inclusive. Security deposit and contract. No pets/kids please. Call 445-9380. MARRIED AND BI?

Support group forming for married, bisexual women. Contact: Alice, P.O. Box 48, Braintree, MA, 02184.

Membership

Membership dues are currently our major source of income.

Presently, the Newsletter is free to all on our mailing list. As our major means of outreach we feel that this newsletter should be available to as many women as possible. We request your support.

In a little over one year the Network has grown from a small group of eight women to over 200 members. And, at every meeting, more new faces appear, eager to discuss topics, share personal experiences, and make connections.

The Network is you! Share an idea, coordinate an event, offer your comments and suggestions, chair a committee--PARTICIPATE!

TREASURER'S REPORT. Thanks to good collections at the last two general meetings, continued mail-in memberships, and the success of our holiday social December 16th, the current balance of the BBWN treasury stands at over \$300.00. This will enable us to purchase an annual bulk mailing permit, which will cut mailing costs by over 50%; to rent the space we need to hold our general meetings; and to publicize meetings and other events.

Thank you for your donations! Also, we welcome donations of any goods (such as envelopes, or refreshments for a party) or services (such as copying or word-processing).

THE NEXT COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5TH, 1984 AT 3:00 PM, in Somerville. Directions will be handed out at the next General Meeting, or write for directions to our P.O. Box, attention "Coordinating Committee."

REMEMBER, CONFIDENTIALITY IS AN ISSUE... Many women in the network require confidentiality. As written into the present by-laws, the network mailing list is available only to voting members on official network business. If you want to reach someone in the network, you can place a notice in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Conversations

Four members of the Newsletter committee got together to talk about identity issues. The following is an excerpt from our discussion.

B: Is this (bisexuality) the trend of the 80's?

L: I've been involved with both men and women, but that's not my goal--it's just what happened. I didn't join the Network to try for that. I needed a definition to explain it--it fit.

J: Socially, bisexuality is seen as trendy. I think a lot of people's stereotype is molded by their social circle.

B: You're right. It's difficult to maintain my bisexual, gay-identification. Having a male lover, I'm straight ~~by~~ outward appearances. Each identity cuts off some part of the other.

S: I'd thought of that recently. Is being bisexual and being monogamous mutually exclusive?

J: Well, if you're a married women and are attracted to women, aren't you bisexual? Or, if you're in a lesbian relationship and attracted to men, aren't you also bisexual?

L: Is it a state of mind, or what?

S: I feel that it's a statement of possibilities. Do you think of bisexuality as a potential? Your current sexual relationship doesn't completely define who you are.

B: Bisexuality is a social identification too. I guess it's more a matter of lifestyle for me as opposed to sexual definition.

S: Telling lesbian friends that you're bisexual and straight friends that you're gay-identified is a real dilemma.

L: You feel like you're straddling fences everywhere you go.

J: Exactly. Wouldn't it be nice to live in a society where you could move freely back and forth among these groups and be accepted?

J: A lot depends on enlightenment. Are we ever going to be able to define what bisexuality is?

S: Never completely. That's just it--the variety of lifestyles that we see between us defies definition.

B: It's also a political identification. Being in the Network and calling myself a gay identified bisexual is a way I look at the world...the sympathy, as a feminist, that I share with other women.

L: Becoming a feminist was an essential step in my coming to a bisexual identity. I don't know if I would have had the strength to call myself bisexual without a group support structure. The identity was there for the taking.

Yes! Sign me up! I want to be a

- Contributing Member - \$25
- Regular Member - \$10
- Truly Needy Member - \$5

THANK YOU!

Name _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
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P.O. Box 1534, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

Bisexuality: loving whom we choose-part 1

BY LISA ORLANDO (Reprinted from Gay Community News)

In the early days of our movement, many gay liberationists agreed that both homosexual and heterosexual desire exist as potentials in all human beings. They believed that heterosexual culture so vigorously oppresses those who insist on expressing homosexual desire because - as Martha Shelley, one of the first post-Stonewall theorists, wrote - we are heterosexuals' "own worst fears made flesh." Even lesbian-feminists like the Furies Collective affirmed the inherent bisexuality of human nature. If the feminist and gay liberation movements succeeded, they thought, the gay/straight dichotomy would disappear. Although, as Dennis Altman pointed out, many people would still not practice bisexuality, we would nevertheless achieve the "end of the homosexual" as a meaningful category.

Belief in bisexuality as a utopian potential has not always coincided, as it has for Altman, with support for and acceptance of bisexuals. Nevertheless, bisexuals who were active in the earliest days of the gay liberation movement seem to have had little trouble being accepted as gay. But times change. Few gay activists now claim to be striving for a bisexual paradise or to regard bisexuality as a repressed human potential. And while many non-bisexual gays have, as individuals, supported us and encouraged our attempts to organize, the lesbian/gay community abounds with negative images of bisexuals: fence-sitters, traitors, cop-outs, closet cases, people whose primary goal in life is to retain "heterosexual privilege," power hungry cold-hearted seducers who use and discard their same sex lovers like so many Kleenex.

Some of these stereotypes result from the ambiguous position of bisexuals, poised as we are between what currently appear as two mutually exclusive sexual cultures, one with the power to exercise violent repression against the other. Others grow out of the deeply held belief, contrary to that of early gay liberation, that homosexual and heterosexual desires exclude each other. Still others result from lesbian-feminism, which argues that lesbianism is a political choice having little to do with sexual desire per se. From this point of view, a bisexual woman "still define[s] herself in terms of male needs" (Loretta Ulmschneider of the Furies) rather than, as she herself might

argue, in terms of her own desires. Since lesbian feminism equates meeting male needs with supporting male supremacy, it considers bisexual women traitors by definition.

Other factors may have played a role in shifting attitudes towards bisexuals: the growth of lesbian/gay "lifestyles" and ghettos: the boundaries produced by constructing gay people as a "minority"; the development of sexual identity as a political concept; even, as Cindy Patton has argued, the brief heyday of media-created "bisexual chic," which trivialized bisexuality as just another fashion.

But these stereotypes also resonate with some people's personal experience and with the subcultural lore developed out of collective experience. Most stereotypes reflect some small aspects of reality which they then serve to reinforce. Some bisexuals do act in stereotypical ways, often because we have internalized our social image. And because non-bisexuals view this behavior through the lens of the stereotype, they perceive it as evidence of the truth of the stereotype rather than as an individual action. As more bisexuals refuse to hide our sexuality, as we organize within the gay community, we can better challenge the supposed reality of these negative images and demonstrate that they are, like other stereotypes, essentially false. Other gay people will be forced to recognize that as a group bisexuals are no more "promiscuous" or incapable of commitment than anyone else (like many stereotypes of bisexuals, this also runs rampant in the straight world). "Heterosexual privilege" doesn't prevent us from being queerbashed on our way home from the bars or having our children taken away when we come out. We look just like other queers, i.e. we range from blatant to indistinguishable from straights. And many of us not only involve ourselves in lesbian/gay struggles but also identify ourselves primarily with the gay community.

As we challenge people on their more easily disproved beliefs, they may also begin to question whether they perceive their personal experiences with bisexuals in a distorted way. I think we might better explain at least some of the stories about bisexuals who leave their same-sex lovers for heterosexual relationships in the same ways we explain being left, period,

NEXT COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING:
Sun. 3/25 Call 628-4390 for info

NEXT GENERAL MEETING: WED. 3/21 at 7:30
186 Hampshire St, Cambridge ALL WELCOME!

134 Hampshire St. Cambridge, MA.

wine & beer patio

HOMEMADE BREADS - Soups - Salads - desserts

Sat./Sun
brunch

MODERN TIMES
CAFE

354-8371

rather than as some special form of desertion and betrayal. And if we examine the problems we have with bisexual lovers whose primary relationships are heterosexual, they resemble quite closely the problems we have had in similar "secondary" relationships with homosexuals.

Nevertheless, since most bisexuals are acutely aware of the differences between heterosexual and homosexual relationships, some probably do "settle" for heterosexual relationships, at whatever emotional cost, and for all the reasons one might imagine. I find it as difficult to condemn them as to condemn homosexuals who seek therapy to "become" heterosexual - oppression is ugly and we all want out, whether we seek individual or collective solutions. Other gay people rarely notice, however, that most bisexuals continue to have homosexual relationships despite the weight of heterosexual oppression. This can only testify to the fact that heterosexual relationships generate their own problems - and that the power of desire often overcomes that of oppression. Many homosexuals resent the fact that the thoughtless pleasures of a heterosexual relationship always exist as an option for bisexuals and fear that, as homophobia intensifies, more bisexuals will take that option. But "option" seems a strange expression to describe repressing an entire aspect of one's sexuality and the closet exists as an "option" for all queers.

We all suffer when we choose to follow a desire for which we will be oppressed. We suffer even more when we force ourselves to repress such a desire. And although the experiences differ, we suffer whether, as with bisexuals, our desire might take other paths or whether, as with homosexuals, the only path is total repression. In each of these cases, our suffering results from the power of a homophobic society. We all share an interest in assuring that bisexuals make their choices, conscious or not, on the basis of desire rather than oppression. And gay liberation offers the only guarantee that this will happen.

Those who view bisexuals as untrustworthy because of our "options" at least acknowledge that we exist. Others insist that we are closet cases temporarily stuck in a transitional stage in the coming-out process. I hope that as bisexuals begin to speak for ourselves we will weaken this notion since many of us have identified as such for years - and lifetimes. I wonder, however, if the power of this belief might not resist such evidence. While I would argue that gay identity is essentially political - something we construct to promote solidarity and oppose our oppression - for many people, gay identity seems to imply that we all naturally possess a sexual identity and that this identity just as naturally fits into one of two categories.

Why do so many people who oppose the other forms of madness created and perpetuated by the psychiatric/medical establishment so wholeheartedly embrace the notion of a strict division between heterosexuality and homosexuality, a notion which originated alongside that of homosexuality as disease? As much gay historical research has shown, "homosexuality" as we understand it in the West didn't exist until

religious ideology began to lose ground and medical ideology took its place. What Christianity saw as a sinful potential in everyone, psychiatry reconceptualized as a sickness which permeated one's being, displacing heterosexual desire. Many psychotherapists see bisexuality as an inability to grow up and accept reality - Natalie Shainess, for example, seems to think that homosexuality can be healthy but that bisexuals need to be treated - for their "immaturity!" Many people in the gay community thoughtlessly parrot these opinions. But to assume that homosexual and heterosexual desires are mutually exclusive is like assuming that no s/m people ever enjoy vanilla sex or that no boy lover is ever attracted to men. That so many people do assume these things testifies to the incredible power of our need to fit things into neat dichotomies.

Human beings tend to use dual classification when we think about our world - pairs such as up/down and hot/cold as well as pairs such as human/animal and man/woman, where more value is placed on one term - probably because such oppositions structure language itself. Many anthropologists believe that when some aspect of a culture gains particular prominence or importance people feel an even stronger need to fit it into such a scheme and will become uneasy in the face of ambiguities. The "disorder" resulting from central features of our lives when we cannot fit into dichotomies with sharp boundaries disturbs us deeply. I suspect that the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy gained acceptance as both sexuality and "personal identity" became central to our culture. Whether or not this is true, most of us feel threatened when the categories we believe in are challenged, especially if they shape our sense of who we are. Not only do bisexuals contradict a primary set of cultural categories - our culture calls us "decadent" because we refuse to play by the rules, thereby undermining the social "order" - but we challenge many people's personal sense of what constitutes sexual identity. Whether we threaten by introducing a third category or by undermining the notion of categories altogether, we cause enough discomfort that many people deny our existence.

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It has occurred to me lately how difficult it can be to write about bisexuality. Having other women with similar experiences to talk to should be liberating--and of course it mostly is. But in the absence of a time-worn bisexual "analysis" of human sexuality, of relationships, of feminist politics, of the world in general, it can also be a tentative, difficult and lonely thing. So little groundwork has been laid that I am forced constantly to refer back to my own experiences, a subjective and risky business.

But there is much ground to cover, and a lot of work to do. It will ultimately benefit all of us who choose to call ourselves "bisexual" if we can move beyond the realm of discussing our personal experiences, and strive to send a collective message about bisexuality out into the gay and straight communities. Especially in relation to our lesbian sisters, bisexuality will continue to be a source of suspicion and separation until bisexual women can make themselves known--publically, privately, with enthusiasm and pride, and a clear understanding of the choices they have made. If the network is to be in part a political entity, it seems to me this must be one of its primary political goals.

The topic for the next general meeting is bisexuality in relationships, and it implicitly suggests an issue that most bisexual women must grapple with: commitment. For myself, I am involved "monogamously" with a man. The problems with this arrangement are many and varied. How can I continue to name myself bisexual, to FEEL bisexual, when confined to a heterosexual relationship? Although I am probably monogamous by nature, how can I consider cutting myself off from the wealth of emotional and sexual experience I have had with women? How, as a feminist, will I ever be satisfied with a man? Must I make a choice, one over the other? Or perhaps bisexuality implies plurality, variety, and the inability to choose?

For all of the above, I don't know the answers, and probably never will. I do know, however, that relationships with men and women provide very different things. With women, the common experience of womanhood seems to make possible an emotional/physical bonding of immense potential and intensity. Words like sharing, warm, enveloping, soft come to mind. With men, the very fact of a sex difference seems to create an exciting tension, a complementarity, a subtle sparring that can be (sexually) attractive. In some ways, the "possibilities" that may attract each of us away from commitments to our primary lovers are made all the more excruciating by the lure of a sexual difference. How easy it can be to fantasize that were I involved with a woman, ALL of the difficulties I encounter in bonding with another human being would vanish. How tempting it can be to not only long for a difference in lovers, but a whole realm of difference in quality of emotion, sexuality, and lifestyle. Perhaps bisexuality means de facto a greater degree of "temptation", a harder fight to maintain our commitments to the primary relationships we choose.

Again, the answers may always elude us. The only clear "truth" that remains may be the fact of our enormous capacities as human creatures to experience erotic, emotional and spiritual love. As bisexual women, we are in a unique position to acknowledge that truth to its fullest degree.

-B-

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Lectures/Ideas/Political

3/21 (Wed.) - BBWN General Meeting.
"Bisexuality & Commitment in Relationships."
7:30 pm at 186 Hampshire St. Cambridge. All Welcome!

3/25 (Sun.) - BBWN Coordinating Committee. 3 pm. Directions: 628-4390. All BBWN members welcome!

3/22 (Thurs.) - Nicaragua Libre! Slide show & discussion on the revolution and US policy toward Nicaragua. Jean Gallo. 7:30 pm, New Words, 186 Hampshire St. \$2.

Concerts

3/23 (Fri.) - FERRON w/Patty Larkin. Sanders Theatre 7:30 pm. \$7.50 adv., \$8 door. 547-5704.
3/24 (Sat.) - EURHYTHMICS 7:30, Orpheum, \$12.75, 11.75.

3/30 & 3/31 (Fri. & Sat.) Black Sheep Review/WERS Benefit Concert.

4/11 (Wed.) TOM PAXTON/CONNIE CALDOR/STRING BAND. Sanders Theatre. 7:30. 547-5704.

4/25 (Wed.) LORI ANDERSON. 7:30, Opera House, \$14.75 & 15.75.

4/27 (Fri.) ELIZABETH COTTON/ROBIN FLOWER BAND. 7:30, Paine Hall, \$7 adv., \$8 door. 547-5704.

NEXT COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING
Sun 3/25 3pm. 628-4390 for info.

(617) 498-9923 ANS. SERV.

PEGGY FOX, Ed.D.

LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

COUNSELING, GROUPS,
SUPERVISION, TRAINING

7 STANDISH ST.
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NEWSLETTER STAFF: Barb H, Robyn T, Editors
Betsy B, Kate K, Sylvia S, Stephanie L
Design: Jean K

4 Political Action News

cont. from p.2

The newly formed Political Action Group of BBWN met of February 28. This meeting generated a proposal for political action which will be presented to the Coordinating Committee on March 25. The proposal focuses on the following actions:

1. Write letters to other gay organizations to introduce & publicize BBWN.
2. Encourage BBWN members to get involved with gay/lesbian groups, & suggested this might be easier for women if they attend in groups.
3. Organize the bisexual contingent for Boston's Gay Pride March in June.
4. Develop a forum on bisexuality, cosponsored with a lesbian organization, possibly as a Gay Pride Week event.
5. Make specific political endorsements.

Further involvement & input by members is welcome at the 3/25 Coordinating Committee meeting.



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PERSONALS

Feminist roommate wanted for friendly three bedroom apartment on Beacon St. in Brookline. W. to W. carpets, new paint, skylight, glassed in porch. One sympathetic straight woman, and a bisexual feminist. Somewhat cooperative home. Very bad experience with last person but looking to meeting someone new. Call Jean K at 437-1600 X310 (work) or 739-2963. \$237. htd.

Prof. BiF sks 1-2 responsible BiF, GF or OK (feminist) M in spacious apt or hse on Green Ln in Cleve Cir/Bkline/Brighton. Am nonsmoker, mainly veg., allerg to cats & probably dogs. Prefer to move 6/1 or 9/1 but am flexible. I enjoy roommates, hope to find 1-2 who are fun but stable, communicative but indep. Am more than willing to give support, share food/chores & bring any furn/utens U need. People more import. to me than \$. If U're lknng for someone like me to share, pls. call Lucy 566-5310. Thanks.

If we wish to develop a liberatory politics, we must ask, as early gay liberation did, whether our need to classify simultaneously violates the truths of at least some people's desires and plays into heterosexism. Obviously we will never stop classifying: we couldn't speak or even think if we did. But we must be wary of both our obsession with order, with getting rid of "dirt," and our tendency to see the categories we use as natural or simply given rather than as the social and political constructions they are. This is particularly true with those categories which bear the most political weight. But the historically specific categories we use to think about our world, including our selves, do more than merely describe accurately or violate the truth of our desire. They also shape and even create them. We must question as well the whole notion of an essential sexual truth which somehow resides in each of us.

I don't think anyone knows what desire is, where it comes from or why it takes the general and specific forms it does. I'm inclined to believe that some kind of interaction between a more or less shapeless biological drive and a combination of individual experiences and larger social forces creates each of our unique sexualities. But the way we as "modern" people experience them, the mere fact that we experience something we call "sexual identity," is peculiar to our particular culture and historical period. Much current history and anthropology argues that all our talk about "identity crisis" and "finding ourselves," even our very notion of sexuality, would simply mean nothing to people from another time and place. If both the way we view our selves and the categories into which we fit them are modern social constructions, not timeless truths, I can't view my own sense, however subjectively powerful, that I am "really" anything with less than suspicion. The human mind too easily interprets - and reinterprets - anything and everything to fit its current beliefs.

But we still have no better way of describing our experience than by saying that we have discovered what we "really" are. In using the term "really," we acknowledge the experience many people have, either of having "always known" or of coming to a place where they finally feel at home. I, too, believe, 17 years after "discovering" my bisexuality and 10 years after relinquishing my lesbian identity, that I am "really" bisexual.

Furthermore, many exclusive homosexuals do experience bisexuality as a stage. This obviously bolsters the subcultural belief that denies the existence of "real" bisexuality. People who have had this experience tend to look back at their old selves with condescension and embarrassment. I suspect that the word "bisexual" triggers unpleasant feelings in many of them which they project on anyone claiming a bisexual identity.

While most self-defined homosexuals may be correct in seeing their own bisexuality as just a stage, inevitably, the situation being what it is, some people who see themselves as exclusively homosexual will have repressed rather than "grown out of" bisexuality. As some lesbians in the 50's who were neither butch nor femme felt forced to choose, so do some bisexuals. Both sides often exert so much pressure to "make up your mind" and direct so

continued on page 6

With this issue, the BBWN Newsletter launches a new feature, a response column for members of the Network and readers of the newsletter. You are invited to send BY THE WAY your personal questions, dilemmas, resource searches and puzzles of life, and we will aim to provide a useful response here in the column.

Our technical consultant and advisor will be Bet MacArthur, LICSW, a counselor and psychotherapist in Cambridge. We encourage everyone looking in to take a risk, and make the column real and useful for all of us. We will try to answer a few letters in each issue.

Dear BY THE WAY;

I recently saw an ad for the BBWN and am thrilled to think that there is a place for me to discuss some of the many questions raised by my newly defined, however vague at this point, identity as a bisexual. Here is one recurring dilemma for me in my consideration of a bisexual lifestyle...

At 27, I have had many positive and supportive relationships with men and women and feel lucky to sexually enjoy both for their differences. However, in every relationship, I am finding myself sooner or later wanting what I cannot have from my present male or female lover.

When I am with a man, after a short time, I begin to miss the depth of communication, soft fuzzy cheeks, and a heartfelt feminist perspective that only a woman can provide. On the other hand, when I am in a relationship with a woman, I begin to miss the company of a man--for the differences?

So it is, the issue of commitment. Is it possible, as a bisexual woman, to be committed to a relationship that is limited by its gender? Or does the very nature of bisexuality suggest a constant searching for the ultimate androgynous individual?

Signed,
WANTING IT ALL

Dear WANTING IT ALL,

The very nature of bisexuality only demonstrates that identity is made up of more than the acts we perform in each day. It is difficult to give up "wanting it all", yet this isn't only the task of every bisexual person who wants primary intimacy, it is also the normal task of every young adult at maturation. At the late twenties and early thirties, the average person is sacrificing "that" to have "this", struggling with giving up some dreams of possibilities, our infiniteness, in order to accept realities that can be lived and filled out. Some find the sacrifice depressing for awhile, but for many other people the discovery of our limits is a relief; freeing energy to be focused on this job, this career, this relationship, this specific goal in my life. The focusing does not require relinquishing your identity as a bisexual person. Certainly communication and intimacy with men is different than it is with women, and if primary intimacy is your goal, you will have to feel out what those differences mean to you personally. But the "ultimate androgynous individual" for you has to be YOURSELF. Get to know who you are without labels, and who loves you with all of your labels on. Describe who you are to yourself, slowly, so you'll know what resources you possess to bring to your own "this". Then the work is meeting a partner who accepts and supports your identity, without having to embody it for you.

Ongoing

Sunday

A support group including deaf and differently abled women. Free brunch. Captioned movies, entertainment and interpreters. Every 3rd Sun. at Somewhere Else, 295 Franklin St. 423-7730.

Calling on Women: A Call-In Radio Show - 6-6:30 pm. WGBH 89.7 FM. Talk Line 868-9170.

Monday

The Women's Talk Show - WRBB 104.9 FM. 6-7 pm. Music, info, interviews.

Nat'l. Assn. of Social Workers Gay & Lesbian Task Force meets 1st Mondays 8 pm. Sharing concerns re: being gay and providing gay services in the work place, etc. Call Lorrie - 436-7521 or Carrie 482-0557.

Tuesday

Daughters of Bilitis. Disc. & social group. Old Camb. Baptist Church. 1151 Mass Av. 661-3663.

Urania. Bisexual and lesbian s/m group meets every 1st Tues. of the month. Safe, non-competitive space for women of all levels of experience to share political and personal aspects of sexuality. 7:30 pm. Info: Beth 623-7258. Mail: Box 23, 89 Mass. Av. Boston 02115.

Wednesday

Boston NOW Lesbian Rights Task Force meets 4th Wed. at 99 Bishop Allen Dr. (Central Sq.) Plan lobbying, public education, consciousness raising. Info: 661-6015.

Thursday

Boston Women's Pentagon Action. Feminist antimilitarist discussion and organizing mtg. Every other Thurs. 7-9:30, Women's Center. 46 Pleasant St. Central Sq. Call Melissa 864-1466.

BBWN DISCUSSION/SUPPORT GROUPS - If you would like to start a new/special interest group or if you would like to join a new or ongoing group call Robyn 628-4390.

CALENDAR LISTINGS: Please send all listings to BBWN. Submission deadline for next issue 4/15.

HAVE CHILDREN OR THINKING ABOUT HAVING THEM? Interested in sharing feelings/ideas on the subject? Contact Sara B., c/o BBWN by 4/15.

TELEPHONE (617) 498-9923

BET MACARTHUR, ACSW LICSW
COUNSELING, PSYCHOTHERAPY
CONSULTATION & TRAINING

14 PLEASANT ST.
CENTRAL SQUARE
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

much contempt at people who are unwilling to do so - and most of us are so unaware of bisexuality as a legitimate possibility - that a simple need for acceptance and community often forces people (particularly, and often most painfully, young people) to repress one aspect of their desire. Just as closet queers (also perhaps bisexual) often lead the pack in homophobic attacks, so may closet bisexuals be the most intensely biphobic. I think this is particularly true among women who came out via lesbian-feminism.

The fact is that many women who now identify as bisexual experienced lesbianism as a stage. I identified as bisexual before the women's movement but, as happened with many women, consciousness-raising and traumatic experiences fueled an acute anger and disgust with men which led me to lesbianism. Other of these women may have become lesbians because they accepted the lesbian-feminist dictum that "feminism is the theory and lesbianism is the practice." Or they may simply have succumbed to peer pressure (even some heterosexual women "became" lesbians for these reasons). Over the years, many of us, often because of working in political coalitions, have reconnected with the world outside the "women's community" and have discovered, or rediscovered, our heterosexual desires. We are now attacked for having "gone back into the closet," as traitors, and as self-deceiving fools.

The theoretical and emotional need to keep alive both the notion that all true feminists are lesbians and the belief that no rap-prochement with men is possible fuels lesbian-feminist hatred of bisexuals. Many lesbians who oppose other forms of separatism, who work with men politically and have male friends, still see sexual separatism as a eternal given. But as political separatism falls into disrepute, sexual separatism also loses its rationale. As many lesbians recognize that class, race, age, etc. may be as powerful sources of oppression as gender and sexual orientation, they also recognize the futility of separatism as more than a stage. Few people - and fewer sexual radicals - really want a movement which forbids us to fuck people whose race, sex, class, physical abilities, age, looks, etc. aren't exactly the same as ours. And many of us - s/m people, boy-lovers, butch-femme lesbians as well as bisexuals and

many "vanilla" homosexuals - refuse to have our desires and sexual practices dictated by anyone else's idea of political correctness.

Many bisexuals, like many homosexuals, have never identified with gay politics. But some of us, including many women who have rejected lesbian-feminism, have committed ourselves to gay liberation. We see gay identity and solidarity as crucial, since heterosexism oppresses all gay people, whether homosexual or bisexual, and we can only struggle against it as a self-conscious group. The ambiguous nature of our sexuality needn't imply any ambiguity in our politics. By choosing gay identity we acknowledge that sexuality dominates our identity in a heterosexist world while recognizing that in a non-oppressive society no one would care who we wanted or who we fucked and sexuality would no longer be so central to our sense of who we are.

Unfortunately, political movements and embattled subcultures have particular difficulty acknowledging ambiguities of any kind and the current plethora of "ex-lesbians" haunts the political unconscious of the lesbian/gay movement. But the rest of the gay community ignores or ostracizes us at its peril: embattled as we all are, we need all the forces we can muster. Bisexuals often encounter unusual opportunities to confront and contradict homophobia and, if we have been encouraged to develop gay consciousness, we will act powerfully and efficiently in such situations.

But if it rejects us, the gay movement loses more than numbers and strategic force. It also loses another opportunity, similar to that offered by other "sexual minorities," to re-examine its commitment to sexual liberation rather than to mere interest-group politics. What would it mean for the gay movement to acknowledge that some people experience their sexuality as a lifelong constant, others as a series of stages, some as a choice and many as a constant flux - and that all of these experiences might be socially constructed? I think it might mean a renewed commitment to the revolutionary impulse of gay liberation, which, believing that homosexual desire was a potential in everyone, celebrated the proliferation of erotic possibilities and insisted on sexual freedom as the ultimate goal of our struggle.

In less than a year the BBWN has grown from a small group of 8 women to over 225 women. And we continue to grow. Membership dues are currently our major source of income. We request your support. The BBWN is us! The Newsletter is put together by members volunteering their time, as are our meetings, parties & other projects. There are all kinds of ways to get involved and we need your help to flourish. Give as little or as much time as you can. Share an idea, help set up a party or meeting, help work on the newsletter, come to the C.C. meeting - PARTICIPATE! Call Robyn at 628-4390 for info.

Look for Live From The Very Front Row in local record stores, or send \$7.99 to Galaxia Women Enterprises, P.O. Box 1268, Framingham, MA 01701
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Yes! Sign me up! I want to be a:
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Truly needy member (\$5)
(make checks to BBWN) THANK YOU!

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/ZIP: _____

TEL #: _____

I'D BE INTERESTED IN WORKING ON: _____

WHO ARE WE? WHAT ARE OUR LIFESTYLES? OUR POLITICS? This survey hopes to provide answers to these questions. A report of the results of this survey will be printed in the next issue of the BBWN Newsletter. This is a survey by us and for us, so please support our effort by sending your completed questionnaire to BBWN, Box 1534, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130 by April 15. All responses will be treated confidentially. If you have any questions, feel free to call Robyn at 628-4390. Thank you.

7

1. Which place best describes your own sexuality? (circle one)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Homosexual	Mostly Homosexual	More homo- sexual than heterosexual	Both equally	More hetero- sexual than homosexual	Mostly heterosexual	Heterosexual

2. Which place best describes your own lifestyle?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Homosexual	Mostly Homosexual	More homo- sexual than heterosexual	Both equally	More hetero- sexual than homosexual	Mostly heterosexual	Heterosexual

3. Do you consider yourself "bisexual"? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure If yes, for how many years?

4. Do you consider yourself "lesbian"? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure If yes, for how many years?

5. Do you consider yourself "gay"? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure If yes, for how many years?

6. Are you out as bisexual to your parents? ☐ Yes ☐ To mother only ☐ To father only
☐ To neither ☐ Not applicable

7. Are you out as bisexual to siblings? ☐ Yes ☐ To some but not all ☐ No ☐ I'm an only child

8. Are you out as bisexual to your housemates? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Some ☐ Not appl.

9. Age at which you can remember your first attraction to: Another female A male

10. Age at which you had first sexual relationship (if ever): With a man With a woman

11. Age at which you had first "boyfriend," if ever: First "girlfriend," if ever

12. In the past 5 years, I have been involved in: (fill in number)

<input type="text"/> Relationships w/men	<input type="text"/> Relationships w/women	(Relationship = more than a "one-nighter")
<input type="text"/> Monogamous relationships w/men	<input type="text"/> Monogamous relationships w/women	

13. Are you currently involved in an on-going relationship?

☐ Yes, w/man ☐ Yes, w/woman ☐ Yes, w/woman & man
☐ No, but want to be ☐ No, don't want to be ☐ No, not clear whether I want to be
If yes, is this relationship monogamous? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Do you want this relationship to be monogamous? ☐ Yes ☐ No

14. Do you hope to be in a long-term primary relationship (i.e. "settle down") some day?

☐ Yes, a monogamous one ☐ Yes, a non-monogamous one ☐ No ☐ Not sure

15. If yes, would you prefer this relationship to be: (circle one)

1	2	3	4	5
with a man	probably with a man	no preference	probably with a woman	with a woman

16. Have you ever lived with a lover? ☐ Yes, w/woman ☐ Yes, w/man ☐ Yes, both man & woman ☐ No

17. Have you ever been legally married? ☐ Yes ☐ No. Are you married now? ☐ Yes ☐ No.

18. It has been said that, in general, bisexuals are less likely to maintain a monogamous relationship and, thus, are poor risks as lovers. What is your opinion?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly agree			No different from non-bisexuals			Strongly disagree

19. In terms of your ability to maintain a monogamous relationship, what do you think of above statement?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly agree			No different from non-bisexuals			Strongly disagree

20. Have you any children? ☐ Yes, more than one ☐ Yes, one ☐ No

QUESTIONNAIRE P.2

21. Do you expect to have children someday? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Probably not ☐ Probably ☐ Unsure
22. Do you feel that you would need to be involved in a primary relationship before choosing to have children?

☐ Yes ☐ No If so, what gender would you prefer your partner to be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly prefer male			No preference			Strongly prefer female*

23. How did you find out about BBWN? (Check all that apply?) ☐ Newspaper ad ☐ Poster
☐ Word of mouth ☐ Radio ☐ Women's Center ☐ Other: _____
24. Have you paid BBWN dues? ☐ Yes ☐ No
25. What activities would you like to see BBWN involved in (Number in order of preference)
- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parties | <input type="checkbox"/> Potlucks | <input type="checkbox"/> Increasing awareness among lesbians/gays |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expanded newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Support groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Increasing awareness among straights |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | | |

26. What other organizations of any type are you currently affiliated with? _____

27. What newspapers or magazines do you regularly read or subscribe to? _____

28. Are you registered to vote? ☐ Yes ☐ No If so, how are you registered?
- ☐ Democrat ☐ Republican ☐ Independent ☐ Other

29. How would you describe your political position?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Conservative						Radical

30. Do you consider yourself a "feminist"? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
31. Have you ever marched in a Gay Pride march? ☐ Yes ☐ No
32. Are you planning to march in Gay Pride this June? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
33. Would you march with the bisexual contingent? ☐ Yes ☐ Part of the time ☐ No ☐ Not sure
34. What is your age?
- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> under 20 | 35. Highest level of education achieved: | 36. Are you currently a student? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 8th grade | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, full-time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25-29 | <input type="checkbox"/> High school graduate | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, part-time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 yrs. college | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35-39 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 yr. college graduate | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 40-45 | <input type="checkbox"/> some graduate | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> over 45 | <input type="checkbox"/> masters | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> doctorate | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> other certification: _____ | |

37. What is your occupation? _____

38. Are you currently employed?
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, less than 20 hr./wk | 39. What is your annual income? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, 20-25 hr./wk | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$5,000/yr. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, more than 25 hr./wk., less than fulltime | <input type="checkbox"/> 5,000-5,999/yr. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, fulltime | <input type="checkbox"/> 6,000-9,999/yr. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No, but looking | <input type="checkbox"/> 10,000-14,999/yr. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No, fulltime student | <input type="checkbox"/> 15,000-19,999/yr. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No, and not looking | <input type="checkbox"/> 20,000-30,000/yr. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, unpaid fulltime parent | <input type="checkbox"/> More than 30,000/yr. |

40. What are you doing Friday night? (just kidding!) Comments: _____

(You may put additional comments on separate sheet, if necessary. We welcome all input. Thank you.)

Please return completed questionnaire to BBWN, Box 1534, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

Bisexuality: loving whom we choose Part II

WHAT WE ARE DOING by Megan Morrison

A new movement is emerging and finding voice within the gay community.

For years bisexuals have felt compelled to hide our true sexual identity in the gay community as well as in the straight world. Now many bisexuals have begun to organize, no longer willing to stay closeted within a community many of us view as our own. We have begun to speak out & to reach out to our gay brothers & lesbian sisters to discuss our similarities & our differences. We have begun to break down the walls of prejudice which separate us & to build solidarity within the gay community so that we can fight collectively for the freedom to love whom we choose.

The controversy generated by Nancy Wechsler's GCN review of a recent Betsy Rose concert is only one indication of how highly charged the issue of bisexuality is here in Boston. As Nancy said afterwards, "It is striking that people thought that the criticism underlying my review [was a critique or intolerance of bisexuality], & is a warning to our community that we must talk openly about bisexuality, & soon. There seems to be a lot of mistrust & miscommunication around the issue."

A major goal of the new bisexual networks is to dispel myths & stereotypes which are all too pervasive in the gay community. Bisexuality is often thought to be a mere transition stage between gay identification & a straight lifestyle. Bisexuals are often viewed as fence-sitters, experimenting at the expense of others, out of touch with our feelings, confused about our identity, incapable of loyalty or commitment, willing to have sex with anyone or everyone, less compassionate when ending relationships than either gay or straight people. It is often assumed that bisexuals will inevitably go straight in order to retain heterosexual privilege.

Bisexuality, however, is a valid sexual preference. While many gays have experienced bisexuality as a stage in reaching their present identity, this should not invalidate the experience of people for whom sexual & affectional desire is not limited by gender. For in fact many bisexuals experience lesbianism or homosexuality as a stage in reaching their sexual identification.

Since the question of gender in sexuality is fundamental to the gay movement, one would expect bisexuality to be of major interest. However, the gay community does not always differentiate between the institutionalized heterosexuality of society & the growing movement of bisexuals whose struggles include the fight for sexual freedom of expression without regard for gender.

Bisexuals are people of every age, race, class, or gender. We may be celibate, monogamous, or involved with more than one person at a time. We choose our partners conscientiously & care for them as best we can. We are no more or less loyal, compassionate or loving than the next person. We too experience homophobic discrimination & even violence in our lives. And now we are drawing together to share our common experiences, appreciate our differences, & fight for our rights.

In the past 2 years, bisexual organizations have sprung up in NYC, Boston, Hartford, Chicago, Iowa City & Portland, Oregon. In all, at least 20 bisexual organizations now exist in cities across the US. Each organization has its own focus & not all are made up solely of bisexuals or have bisexuality as their core focus. Some offer counselling, others are social organizations. Many fulfill both of these functions as well as providing support groups, outreach & events planned to educate the public. All groups, regardless of their focus, offer bisexuals a safe, supportive haven.

All bisexual groups interviewed for this article strongly support the gay community & seek equality for all gays, lesbians & bisexuals in areas like employment, housing, medical care & child custody.

[Section on BBWN and Boston deleted.]

In NYC a bisexual women's network was recently started. Last spring a woman wrote to the BiVocals to ask how we had formed our support group. After several support group meetings, they decided to begin a New York network. In October, 1983, they held their first general meeting with 45 women attending. Some were former members of

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NEXT GENERAL MEETING: Wed. 5/23, 7:30 at Harriet Tubman House, 566 Columbus Av. at intersection of Mass. Av. & Columbus Av. (On #1 bus which runs between Harvard Sta. & Dudley Sta.) 2 blocks from Symphony stop on Green line. Wheelchair accessible. Discussion topic - Bisexuality: Pride & Prejudice. All women welcome.

NEXT CC MTG: Sun. 6/3, 5 p.m. At Kate's in Cambridge nr. Central Sq. Call 576-2455 for directions. All members welcome. Come share ideas, get involved.

GAY PRIDE MARCH! June 16, 12 noon, from Copley Sq. to the Common. Meet your fellow marchers at a BBWN BRUNCH BEFORE THE MARCH, 10am at 565 Boylston St. (Copley Sq.), 2nd fl. (Location is wheelchair accessible but we must know in advance to get the elevator key.) \$2 donation requested for brunch, and RSVP to 576-8612. We will be assembling for the march at 11:30 outside 565 Boylston. See you there! Any questions? Call 576-8612.

the now defunct The Forum. In December they held another general meeting at the Wow Cafe. Their plans for the spring include a formal discussion with members of the lesbian community about what it means to be bisexual.

Several NYC & Boston women, along with others from throughout New England, met at a spontaneously organized discussion at the 1983 New England Women's Musical Retreat. In an environment where being a lesbian is almost a prerequisite, most of the 50 women who met to talk about their bisexuality & their taboo status found strength & happiness in finding each other.

The women from Hartford who organized the discussion at the Musical Retreat had been meeting regularly for the past 2 years. One of the projects they have been actively involved in is an upcoming conference on bisexuality to be held in Hartford on 3/17/84. The conference will include workshops, panel discussions & entertainment. The format will be small group discussions with larger group sharing.

Halfway across the country, at the 1983 Michigan Women's Music Festival, yet another group of bisexual women found each other. Their impromptu workshop on bisexuality proved to be an affirming, energizing & thought-provoking experience for about 20 women. One newsletter passed among these women subsequent to the Music Festival but distance kept most of them from forming an ongoing organization.

A few women from Chicago, however, were able to continue to meet informally throughout the fall. In January they organized a discussion to bring bisexuality out of the closet in the feminist & gay communities. They plan to have additional small group discussions this spring as well as a party.

There is one other bisexual group in Chicago whose purpose appears to be primarily social. Chicago Bi-Ways held its 1st meeting in Dec., 1978. While they have been unresponsive to inquiries for interviews, their newsletter says that they have approximately 50 members, with frequent social functions which run on a rating system: General Public (G); Alcohol OK, No Other Intoxicants (P); Alcohol & Other Intoxicants OK (R); Sexual Activity Expected & OK (X). All functions listed in the newsletter, however, were rated P, G, or PG. They do not appear to have any political activities though they do support "people who have been oppressed because of sexual preference, gender, age or ethnic group."

Another bisexual group in the Midwest is the Bisexual Support Group (BSG) in Iowa City, Iowa, which was founded a year ago. This group finds itself ostracized by the gay community, which views them with "disbelief or disinterest," according to a spokesperson for the group. They sponsor regular rap sessions to discuss issues surrounding bisexuality as well as social functions. All of their activities are open to both men & women.

This group has been actively working for the recognition of bisexual rights, speaking to groups in the straight community & the Univ. of Iowa about bisexuality. The organization also has a rap line which gets approximately 40 calls a week from both the student population & the community at large.

Since their membership is made up mostly of students, part of their funding comes from the Student Activities Committee of the university. Their funding has recently been threatened by the Students for Traditional American Freedom. This

ultraconservative group has tried to equate bisexuality & homosexuality with bestiality, & to discredit BSG by seeking school funds for its own mock group called "Bestiality at College."

In Hawaii, 2 groups, Both Sides Now in Maui & the Sexual Identity Center in Honolulu, include bisexuals in their charter along with gay men & lesbians. Both groups pointed out that because Hawaii is a large melting pot, differences were readily accepted & bisexuals faced no oppressive attitudes from lesbians or gay men (although one bisexual who recently moved from Hawaii to Boston did report subtle discrimination & intolerance of the bisexual lifestyle.)

Spokespersons for neither group interviewed knew of a single bisexual who was out in their communities at present.

As for their activities, Both Sides Now is involved in educational & social programs. The Sexual Identity Center is mainly a counselling center.

In Portland, Oregon, a bisexual women's group called Heroines United for Growth of Self (HUGS) had been meeting for almost two years. The group writes that they formed "for the purpose of providing a social outlet for bi women in the Portland area. We have since expanded to include rap sessions, book reviews & other activities. We are also trying to reach out to similar groups to hopefully form a network. We have found that our group provided an invaluable support system for bi women here, where there had never been one before."

One of the oldest bisexual organizations in the US, now moving into its seventh year, is the Bisexual Center in San Francisco. Originally, a group of 22 people conceived of the idea of a bisexual community center in order to provide a safe, supportive haven for people to celebrate being bisexual. They were committed to building & organization which served as more than a social center. Now located in the Center's own building are numerous workshops, lectures, seminars, social events, & rap groups dealing directly or indirectly with bisexuality.

The Center receives an average of 40 calls a week from all over the US. Often these calls require crisis intervention: counselling, giving support, information & referrals to callers who are confused, desperate, isolated & sure they are the only ones in the world who feel the way they do. In addition to these services, the Center provides the bisexual community with a newsletter containing numerous letters & news items.

The Center has met its commitment to serve the bisexual community as well as educating the public. They have given 4 or 5 talks a month at various colleges, hospitals, churches & community groups throughout the Bay Area & over the past 7

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TELEPHONE (617) 498-9923

BET MACARTHUR, ACSW LICSW
COUNSELING, PSYCHOTHERAPY
CONSULTATION & TRAINING

14 PLEASANT ST.
CENTRAL SQUARE
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Lesbian Psychologies Conference

3

On March 9, the Boston Chapter of the Association of Women in Psychology sponsored the first national conference on lesbian psychologies. For three days, five hundred women swarmed through the corridors of the Park Plaza, contrasting obviously with the more conservative staff and hotel guests. The management preferred to refer to us as the "Women in Psychology" on their lobby signs - they welcomed our business, but not our presence. Still, there was a powerful sense of excitement, pride, and triumph with our own visibility and professional recognition.

The conference schedule was demanding. The welcome and introduction was followed by a four-women panel which explored varying issues of lesbian identities. After this, the participants were divided into many smaller discussion groups which reconvened at different times throughout the weekend, adding a personal dimension to the event. After lunch, a second panel presented theory, research, and personal reflections on the dynamics in lesbian relationships. That evening, we were warmly entertained by singer Toshi Reagan and feminist humorist, Kate Clinton. It was a relief after a long, intense day.

The next day began with a panel on lesbian communities which ignited sparks of controversy. As conflicts emerged, I began to see a diversity in the lesbian "community" that I had only identified with the bisexual "community". In both cases, we represent women of all classes, race, religion, occupations, locations and political affiliations. In the afternoon, we selected three out of forty-three possible workshops to attend. The choice was overwhelming-worse than Swenson's menu. The final day was divided into two training seminars, offering deeper exploration of the issues for clinicians.

The success of this first conference promises the reality of a second. It accomplished multiple tasks. By identifying relevant psychological theories, (though not all were), it affirmed the emergence of lesbian psychologies into the field. In educating therapists, it validated the healthy nature of bonding between women. Finally, it provided an opportunity to network, to strengthen personal and professional ties.

and its workshop on Bisexuality:

The topic of bisexuality was mentioned by 3 of the women who presented papers in the plenary sessions and, as a result, was discussed in some of the small groups which met after each panel. Several BBWN members who attended the conference felt positive about the way the topic was broached and one commented that it was the first time she had heard bisexuality validated from the podium at a lesbian event.

On Saturday afternoon, [redacted] gave a workshop called "Can You Get Anywhere Going Both Ways?: The Issue of Bisexuality." [redacted] new to the Boston area, has been doing workshops on bisexuality and speaking on panels as an "out" bisexual for several years. After relating some of her personal history, [redacted] described the position she has arrived at as a bisexual feminist committed to lesbian/gay politics. She said that, whenever possible, she resists taking advantage of heterosexual privilege and, as a result, will never marry. Rather than seeing herself as part of a separate category, she insists that she is both fully heterosexual and fully lesbian, that she belongs in both worlds. She asserts that women can construct positive relationships with men; men are not the "enemy"; she believes that heterosexual and bisexual women can be committed allies of lesbian women and are capable of living up to their trust. [redacted] emphasized the notion of choice, saying that any sexual choice is sane and politically

legitimate and that we should be respected for these choices rather than accused of acting compulsively.

[redacted] believes that we must begin to celebrate our differences rather than insist on uniformity. However, she noted we must be able to feel positive about bisexuality if we want to do this. Most of us have internalized at least some of our culture's message that bisexuality is bad. [redacted] ended her workshop by demonstrating a technique that she said could be used, not only by counselors working with bisexuals but also by support groups for bisexuals and even friends, to rid us of internalized oppression.

[redacted] asked for a volunteer to "work" in front of the group. She used this woman to say, in a happy and relaxed voice, "It's great to be bisexual." After she'd said it several times, [redacted] encouraged her to talk about whatever came to her mind. Eventually, the woman began to speak of different reasons that she or other people might not think bisexuality was good. After each negative idea, [redacted] had the woman say again "It's great to be bisexual." In this way, she pointed out, we can get out our negative feelings, even cry about them, without forgetting that being bisexual really is great.

It was very exciting that a workshop like this was presented at a lesbian conference and many women, especially those who had never before been in a group of open bisexuals, obviously benefitted from the experience. I think this workshop would have been even more successful if [redacted] had let us know in advance what she had planned. Several women obviously had hoped for something more participatory and, because [redacted] had not anticipated this, her leadership briefly took on a preemptory tone.

Nevertheless, like much of the rest of the conference, this workshop offered a wealth of useful and provocative information. We welcome [redacted]'s valuable presence in the Boston area.

-----L.O.

(617) 498-9923 ANS. SERV.

PEGGY FOX, Ed.D.

LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

COUNSELING, GROUPS,
SUPERVISION, TRAINING

7 STANDISH ST.
CAMBRIDGE, MA. 02138

Proposed Amendment to Bi-laws:

The following amendment to Article III (1) of the BBWN Bi-Laws has been proposed and will be voted on at the 6/3 C.C. mtg. "After an initial complimentary copy of the Newsletter, any out-of-state individual wishing to remain on the mailing list must pay a subscription fee equal to the full cost of their Newsletter. Subscription exchanges to organizations may be substituted for fee at the discretion of the Coordinating Committee."

4 Political Action News

Last week, five of us met to talk about the theoretical issues underlying the politics and sociology of bisexuality. The decision to start a regular series of such meetings grew out of the last Coordinating Committee meeting, in response to the generally acknowledged need for more intellectual analysis. Several people at the Committee meeting also expressed their desire for a greater sense of feminist underpinnings to the Network's activities and discussions, and everyone agreed that some debate should take place about the overall function, effectiveness, and direction of the BBWN.

The meeting took place at Kate's apartment. Cathy J., Barb H., Silvia S., and Megan M. came.

We started out talking about the BBWN itself. Is it/will it be/can it function as a community? Feelings were expressed that although diversity in support groups and within the network itself is important, after time there arises the need for support and dialogue between people of similar interests and lifestyles. To sustain interest and energy over the longer term, the Network should learn how to "nurture" each of its separate elements, creating groups or forums tailored to the many different kinds of women the Network includes. We listed some of those women: married bisexuals, bisexuals with children, primarily women-identified women, primarily male-identified women, women with histories of lesbian relationships, women with histories of relationships with men, etc.

How to implement the above was briefly discussed. It was strongly felt that although people of similar circumstance may find each other at random in the Network, the leadership of the Network had a responsibility to construct mechanisms that would make such identification clear cut and accessible. A series of discussion groups (from which could evolve support groups) at the Women's Center, with designated facilitators and topics? Plans were not cemented, and anyone with a willingness to organize or a good idea as to how to proceed, please speak up!

Political action and the direction of the network came up next. We refreshed our memories with what the Political Action Group had accomplished. Their discussions and recommendations for action focused on the need to participate in gay pride activities, and to strengthen ties and communication with the gay/lesbian community. In addition to this, we also agreed on the need to strengthen name-recognition, political activities, and education in the STRAIGHT community. To some degree, it was felt that although recognition and acceptance can and should be expected from the lesbian community, there is probably a limit, realistically, on how much encouragement and actual support we will receive. Some lesbians will always be threatened, or extremely angry, or generally "unconvinced" about bisexuality. In directing our energy toward the straight world by fighting institutionalized heterosexuality, whether through political action or education, we automatically strengthen our ties to the gay community and demonstrate that gay pride is our pride, and vice versa.

Ideas for action included lobbying against heterosexist or homophobic legislation at the state and city level, education in schools and community groups about bisexuality, forums, debates and so on.

The group then took a break and prepared for the second half of the evening, which was to be a discussion of feminism and bisexuality.

Is radical feminism the theory and lesbianism the practice? In one opinion, the statement was basically true. If one defines radical feminism as the recognition of patriarchal oppression on a global scale, the world's true "religion"; and the process of actively affirming one's self as WOMAN by women-identification and empowerment, how can radical feminism exist in the context of a woman-man relationship without profound and unceasing conflict? Most of us felt that although radical feminists may develop relationships with individual men to whom they are strongly bonded, the unceasing perception of (white) men as oppressive and culturally privileged means radical feminists look for support, and romantic love, primarily from other women. Men as our rulers, men as war-mongers, are to be hated at, and fought against. How then to reconcile the understandings that derive from radical feminism, and romantic love for a man?

The same conflicts exist for bisexual women who are radical feminists, in their choice to continue present or potential relationships with men. A jumping off point for future discussions could be an exploration of different insights into radical feminism from bisexual, straight, and lesbian viewpoints.

The next meeting of the "Bisexual Study Group" has not yet been arranged. If you are interested in participating (everyone welcome!!) please contact Barb H. at 623-5443. The only ground rules are that the discussion be theoretical in nature, as opposed to a personal focus (like a study group) or a practical focus (like the Coordinating Committee meetings).

-Barb H.-

EDITORIAL

The BBWN is organizing a contingent of bisexual women and their friends to march in the Gay Pride March on June 16 under the following banner: "BOSTON BISEXUAL WOMEN'S NETWORK: GAY LIBERATION IS OUR LIBERATION."

So what is gay liberation all about? We live in a society that denies the freedom, rights, health and safety of persons who do not conform to heterosexist standards. Gays and lesbians are subjected to housing discrimination, they are denied custody of their children, they often lose their jobs, family, religious and social groups because of their refusal to conform to a heterosexual lifestyle. This oppression is not limited to gay people. It is used, to varying degrees, against all people who do not conform to society's established behaviors. Women who choose not to marry, gentle men, single parents, strong women are perceived as a threat to heterosexual society, and, as such, are ridiculed and denied full status in society. Gay liberation = the right of each person to choose a lifestyle based not on socially imposed norms, but on desire and need.

What does gay liberation have to do with bisexuals? By definition, we are not an exclusive community. We embrace a spectrum of lifestyles that spans from monogamously homosexual to monogamously heterosexual behavior. Some of us identify strongly with and are part of the gay community; others do not. But we must all recognize the need to protect our freedom to move along this spectrum at any point, at any time in our lives. We can begin to claim our right to choose lifestyles freely by supporting gay liberation in its challenge against heterosexism.

Join us behind the bisexual banner on June 16 if you can. We will be meeting in Copley Square. Look for our banner. (See p.1)

NEW WORDS

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Readers' Forum

5

Dear BBWN:

I enjoyed the last BBWN newsletter. And I do have a couple of points I'd like to make.

1) The 1974 articles were hauntingly similar to the content of the rest of the newsletter. Not much has changed! But instead of reacting against those who don't understand, I hope to see much more consolidation of who we think we are, as we grow together in a positive way. (Early women's C.R. groups spend a lot of time reacting too, but eventually it was time to simply not spend so much time with some people, especially men, who didn't understand.) It's always hard to grow from old friends, but at some point the shuffling must stop and the new friends must be cultivated. Of course they don't understand - the group is where we can get support and validation; the rest of the gay & straight world is where we can't count on it.

2) Whether one identifies as a historical, spiritual, or active bisexual, at some point the question becomes, are we being political? For some people, "political" means meeting together at general meeting. For me and for many others I know, it also means anti-male sup-remacist or feminist, and anti-hetero privilege, or gay-identified. Regardless of whom we are with at the moment, we can find the safety within the network meetings to question those things which "the outside" accuses us of - trying to get only the benefits of both worlds without any of the sweat. We have a choice between a non-supportive stance (such as the very same Joan Baez whom you quoted in the newsletter saying in 1983 words to the effect of, "I'm really bummed all those lesbians flock backstage to see me - it scares the men off." (Rolling Stone interview) and someone like Alice Walker who says she "happens to be with a man now" but who writes positive lesbian fiction. We need our political actions to show our active and enthusiastic involvement in gay struggles. In other words I'd like to see more action and less reaction.

-----Thanks for listening, Marcia D.

Dear BBWN:

I have described myself, in question 26 of the questionnaire, as very active in the church. I feel it is important to point out that I am "out" to all of my friends and ministers in my present church and former churches in other communities. The church's response to me as a bisexual woman, for the most part, is "ambivalent." I have never experienced any feeling of censure from anyone in the church because of my sexuality.

The society I live in tends to see homosexuality (or bisexuality) and Christianity as opposing issues, and never the twain shall meet. Thus I am often made to feel slightly schizophrenic about these issues; being whole, and at peace, for me means begin honest about my sexuality in the Christian community and honest about my Christian faith in the community of bisexual or gay women. Only when the two are integrated for me, acknowledged as significant realities in my nature, can I be truly free to be myself, all of myself, and to truly give, whether in ministry, or love, or sex, or friendship.

Dear BBWN:

A friend of mine lent me her Jan. '84 copy of the BBWN Newsletter. Unfortunately, I have to give it back so please put me on your mailing list so I may receive my very own copies. (Enclosed is a check to help defray postage, etc.)

The Newsletter format is very exciting. I like the big pages and bold headlines. Barb's cartoon is great!

I found the articles and especially the "Reader's Forum" informative and provoking. BW's letter about coming out to a lesbian friend really hit home. As a dyke who's discovered she's also into S/M, I feel I can understand "the years of soul searching," guilt and fear. I find myself in various closets within closets - out to certain friends about being gay but in the closet re S/M; completely out only to a few dear co-perverts; and totally entombed at work and to family. I know the fear; the tension is high.

BW's friend seem scared to death that BW's coming out as bisexual will somehow affect her personally. This fear, I believe, comes from our not accepting ourselves; depending on outside support from homogenous groups with fixed beliefs; and not daring or taking the time to thoroughly explore and become comfortable with our inner selves. Life is complex and I hope we as women (gay, bi and straight) can learn from, support and treasure our differences. These differences can strengthen, if we know our inner selves, rather than frighten and alienate us.

-----With love and support, Diamond.

Dear BBWN:

There are a lot of things that go into making a conference a success. There are hours of planning meetings, endless numbers of committees to be on, and always a thousand unexpected problems that need to be dealt with. But mostly, it takes lots of people will - I found out just that at the New England Regional Conference on Bisexuality. Cathy and I went down to Hartford on Friday night to attend the conference on Saturday. We found lodging at a small motel about half an hour outside of Hartford. On Saturday morning, my car wouldn't start, so we decided we would call one of the phone numbers on the registration form and say "Help!" And help they did. Michael drove down, picked us up, and took us to the conference. Once there, we hooked up with Jane C. who said we could stay with her that night. We went out to supper with people from the conference - to Poncho McGee's Irish Mexican Restaurant (where else on St. Patrick's Day) - went back to Jane's apartment for coffee and a birthday celebration, and then out dancing till early morning. The next day Jane drove us all around the Hartford area to help me deal with my car.

The conference itself was a success, but it was everyone's friendliness and willingness to lend a helping hand that made us feel very connected to our new friends in Connecticut. I think the people in Hartford deserve a hearty round of applause for all their effort and energy, not to mention heartfelt thanks from Cathy and I.

A sense of community - don't leave home without it!

-----Betty A.

6 Hartford Conference on Bisexuality

I have just returned from the New England Regional Conference on Bisexuality that was held in Hartford, Connecticut. There were a large range of people in attendance. I met people who were quite secure in their bisexual identity, people trying on this identity for the first time, lesbians and gay men exploring bisexuality as an alternative lifestyle, straight men and women married to bisexuals and wishing to better understand the conflicts that exist with this identity, and people just wanting to lend support to the bisexual community. The conference drew people from Connecticut, Massachusetts (approximately 15 BBWN members), New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire.

The day got underway with a welcome and introduction of the workshops that were to be held throughout the day. There were three workshops going on during session 1, SHARING VISIONS. The first workshop, "Living with an Open Hand", was of special interest to married bisexuals in an "open" marriage. "Forming Positive Lifestyles" was the second workshop. Cathy J. attended, and says that it became evident that there is a difference in how men and women define living a bisexual lifestyle. Everyone shared their many different definitions and enjoyed the chance to compare different views. It was decided that although everyone defines bisexuality in different ways, no one way is right or wrong, just different, and we need to be accepting of each others lifestyles. There was also an exploration of whether non-monogamy is inherent to the bisexual identity.

The third workshop, "Creating Labels for Your Sexual Self", very rapidly got underway with a discussion of how labels do and do not help in day to day life. Some felt that labels were restrictive, that they lived a bisexual lifestyle but did not refer to themselves as bisexuals. It was brought up that the label "bisexual" focuses too much on the sexual aspect rather than the emotional component of the lifestyle, unlike "gay" or "lesbian". People also talked some about the positive aspects of labels. Labels seem to acknowledge the presence of a lifestyle and help us feel less alone. After all, "if someone created the label bisexual, then there must be other people out there who feel the way I do". It was also pointed out that without the word "bisexual", none of us would have been at the conference. Labels can help create a community - a place to find others with similar feelings - a place to fit in.

After the first three workshops (of which you chose one), there was a break. A time to grab a bite to eat, continue conversations with people you had connected with, and mill around looking at the various tables set up by merchants carrying items of special interest to the feminist, gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities.

Entertainment for the day was provided by Betsy Rose. She performed at her usual level of excellence and was enthusiastically received by everyone, including our brothers and sisters from New England and New York hearing her songs for the first time. I think it was fairly obvious that Betsy felt quite at home with her primarily bisexual audience.

Session 2, SUPPORT SYSTEMS, also consisted of three workshops. "Organizing Bisexual Support Groups" was given by members of the New York Bi-Women's Network to help give suggestions to people who were interested in starting their own support groups. "Spouse/Lover/Friend Support Group" was a chance to explore some of the issues involved in being a spouse or lover or otherwise close to a bisexually identified person.

"Uses of Therapy" was a heavily attended group run by two psychotherapists. One issue raised was whether or not a straight or gay/lesbian therapist can understand the issues that face a bisexual. Client empowerment was discussed at great length. As consumers seeking therapy, we have the right and need to interview a perspective therapist concerning their views on bisexuality, i.e. can they accept it as a lifestyle? Do they see it as sick and are out to cure it? Are they willing to help you identify and work through the conflicts that arise as a bisexual? Basically, everyone agreed that no generalizations can be made about straight/gay/lesbian therapists; that it

is most important to connect with someone you feel comfortable with and who you feel can understand all of your issues.

In Session 3, SYNTHESIS, several small groups formed. There were women's, men's, and mixed support groups. A few spontaneous groups also formed. The one I attended was "Coming Out Bisexual in the Feminist Lesbian Community". We talked about our own experiences of acceptance and non-acceptance, especially in a separatist lesbian community. At the end of the workshop we all exchanged addresses so we could keep in touch with each other.

Overall, I think that most of the 140 people present felt the day was very worthwhile. Some people found a lot of support and some people found their views being challenged. In either case, I, for one, am looking forward to the Second Annual Regional Conference on Bisexuality.

-Betty A.-

BODYWORKS (A GYM EXCLUSIVELY FOR WOMEN)

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WE WELCOME ALL INPUT.
Deadline for submissions
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Minutes

MINUTES OF COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING 2/5/84

Present: Betsy B, Kate K, Stephanie L, Amy L, Megan M (Facilitator), Lisa O, Lucinda O, Sylvia S, Robyn T.

Discussed: 1) Increase member participation to alleviate workload of already active members. Need to clearly define and delegate work. 2) How to structure General Meetings to meet needs of both new and old members. Is it primarily an intro. to BBWN? 3) Social events: possibility of rotating potluck (needs coordinator), major spring party (needs coordinator); BBWN private party 3/2 (Betsy will coordinate); special mailing to advertise party authorized. 4) Newsletter: proposed format for future newsletters and breakdown of newsletter into departments for which different women would take responsibility; suggested advertising for generating revenue; proposal to purchase bulk mailing permit approved; approved proposal to include questionnaire in next newsletter; proposal for fee for out-of-state recipients of newsletter - proposal to be processed according to bi-laws. 5) strategy for handling incoming mail developed. 6) suggestion that BBWN join Reproductive Rights National Network - to be researched. 7) Need for therapist to refer bi-women to; suggestion that Gay & Lesbian Hotline be utilized as well, pending research into attitude of staffers toward bisexuality. 8) Future meeting times set, and responsibilities delegated.

WHO ARE WE? In an attempt to answer this question, a questionnaire was included in the last issue of the BBWN Newsletter. 62 women completed and returned the questionnaire. Following is a brief summary of their responses to selected questions:

Question #1 asked: "Which place best describes your sexuality?"

Response	#	%
1.Homosexual	2	3.3
2.Mostly homosexual	4	6.5
3.More homo- than hetero-	14	23.0
4.Both equally	23	37.7
5.More hetero- than homo-	14	23.0
6.Mostly heterosexual	4	6.5
7.Heterosexual	0	0

Question #2 asked: "Which place describes your own lifestyle?"

Response	#	%
1.Homosexual	3	4.9
2.Mostly homosexual	7	11.5
3.More homo- than hetero-	17	27.9
4.Both equally	8	13.1
5.More hetero- than homo-	19	31.2
6.Mostly heterosexual	5	8.2
7.Heterosexual	2	3.3

A comparison of the responses to these two questions yields an interesting result: while 37.7% of the respondents described themselves as being equally heterosexual and homosexual in terms of their sexuality, only 13.1% reported living a lifestyle that is equally gay and straight. Also interesting is that on questions #1 and 2, the number of respondents reporting themselves more homosexual than heterosexual (1-3) was roughly equal to the number of respondents reporting to be more heterosexual than homosexual (5.7%).

Question #13 deals with respondents' current sexual involvement. Of the 62 respondents, 19 (31%) are involved with a man; 15 (22.5%) are involved with a woman; 5 (8.1%) are involved with both a man and a woman. 24 (38.6%) are not involved in an ongoing relationship. Of these, 13 (54%) would like to be; 3 (12.5%) are not looking for an ongoing relationship; and 8 (33.7%) are unsure whether they want to be in one.

8 (12.9%) are between 20-24 years old; 25 (40.3%) are between 25-29; 28 (45.1%) are between 30-34; 10 (16.1%) are between 35-39; and 1 (1.6%) over 46. None were 40-45 or under 20.

56 consider themselves feminists (90.2%); 1 does not; and 5 were unsure.

86% have at least 4 years of college. 29% have masters degrees.

A more extensive report of the results of the questionnaire will be in the next issue of the newsletter. -----Robyn



years their members have appeared on a number of local & national radio & TV talk shows. Largely due to their efforts, San Francisco State, City College, San Francisco General Hospital, the National Sex Forum, UCSF Medical Center & Planned Parenthood of Alameda County/San Francisco all have a presentation & a section devoted to bisexuality in their human sexuality courses. 2 of their members, in conjunction with the National Sex Forum, have designed into the orientation program of the San Francisco City public health workers a discussion of bisexual lifestyles, concerns & issues.

In addition, the Center is highly committed to "keeping our community politically aware & conscious & in close alignment with our lesbian sisters & gay brothers."

A sister organization to the Bisexual Center is BiPol, an independent political committee supporting bisexual identity & rights within the lesbian, gay & bisexual communities.

"The gay community oppresses bisexuals in the same way as the straight world. The biphobia is just another form of bigotry," said Alan Rockway of BiPol. "We are challenging both the gay community & the straight world in working for our rights."

BiPol recently became affiliated with the Coalition for Human Rights.

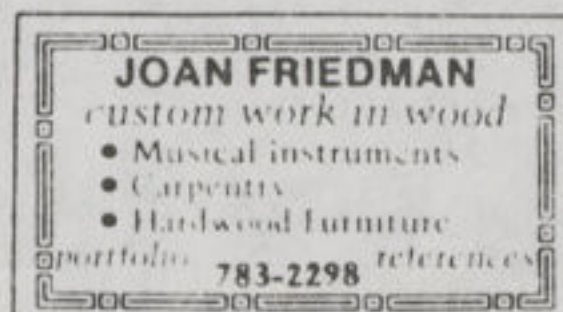
One of their immediate goals is getting the name of the annual parade changed to "Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Pride March." They are presently preparing a formal letter but there has already been heated discussion in the San Francisco gay press. They are also working to get bisexual speakers included at the rally.

BiPol marched for the first time last year. Next year they will have a booth in addition to a contingent in the march.

Last May, BiPol sponsored a conference on "Bisexuality & the Gay & Lesbian Community." This year they will sponsor another conference looking back over the past year stressing the unity between bisexuals & gays.

Finally, they are organizing a rally in front of the Moscone center for the day before the Democratic National Convention in order to bring attention to the importance of including bisexuals in the wording of the federal non-discrimination legislation the Democratic Party is expected to endorse. They are working with two groups from Florida on this rally, the Oral Majority & the Eleanor Roosevelt Appeal for Full Equality. They would like any organization which supports bisexuality to join them.

In conclusion, I would like to relate an incident that occurred last summer at the New England Women's Musical Retreat. In the final match of the so-called "Lesbian Family Feud," the game show host, feminist comedian Kate Clinton asked the question: "What are the five hottest topics in the lesbian community this year?" Around me I heard several calls of "Bisexuality!" One woman buoyantly responded to their calls, "Not this year, but next!"



8 CALENDAR

5/22 (Tues.) CRIS WILLIAMSON & TRET PURE, 8pm, Sanders Theatre. For info call 547-5704.

5/23 (Wed.) BBWN GENERAL MEETING. 7:30. See listing p. 1.

6/2 (Sat.) PATSY MONTANA & CATHY FINK, 8pm. Paine Hall. For info call 547-5704.

6/3 (Sun.) BBWN COORDINATING COMMITTEE MTG. See listing p. 1.

6/7 (Thurs.) GAY RIGHTS RALLY. Fanuel Hall 7:30 p.m. To propose human rights ordinance which will include prohibition of discrimination against people based on sexual orientation. For more info call Ben Klein 262-3814.

6/16 (Sat.) GAY PRIDE MARCH. From Copley Sq. Noon. Bisexual contingent meets 11:30.

THE CALENDAR NEEDS YOUR LISTINGS! Please send all listings by 6/15 to BBWN, Box 1534, JP 02130.

BERNI ZISSERSON, A.C.S.W., L.I.C.S.W.
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WE WELCOME ALL INPUT.
Deadline for submissions
for next issue June 15.

NEWSLETTER STAFF: Robyn T, Cathy J., editors. Betty A, Betsy B, Barb H, Jean K, Kate K, Megan M, Lucinda O, Lisa O, Sylvia S

In less than a year the BBWN has grown from a small group of 8 women to over 225 women. And we continue to grow. Membership dues are currently our major source of income. We request your support. The BBWN is us! The Newsletter is put together by members volunteering their time, as are our meetings, parties & other projects. There are all kinds of ways to get involved and we need your help to flourish. Give as little or as much time as you can. Share an idea, help set up a party or meeting, help work on the newsletter, come to the C.C. meeting - PARTICIPATE! Call Robyn at 628-4390 for info.

contributions needed!



BETH WALSH

MASSAGE POLARITY

576-1493

(617) 623-7258

Classified

ROOMMATE wanted for Brighton apt. Porch, yard, DW, AC, 5 min. from MBTA. 200+ util (negotiable). Must be nonsmoker and not allergic to cats, but unfortunately my cats won't permit any new cats. Call Joanna 787-3475.

SUPPORT GROUP seeking new members. Meets every 3rd Sunday evening. Call Stephanie 232-9089.

Roommate wanted for Brookline apt. 3 bedroom on Beacon St. Non-smoking, no pets. glassed in porch wall to wall carpets, large living room, dining room. call evenings 739-2963 home or Jean at 437-1600 X310 work be discreet. \$237/mo heated 1st last security down. friendly people! free immediately.

The BBWN is looking for donations of office supplies. We need a file cabinet, files, etc. Call 576-8612.

We need help typing or word processing the next issue of the newsletter. Please call 576-8612 and leave your name and phone #.

Yes! Sign me up! I want to be a:
Contributing Member (\$25)
Regular Member (\$10)
Truly needy member (\$5)
(make checks to BBWN) THANK YOU!

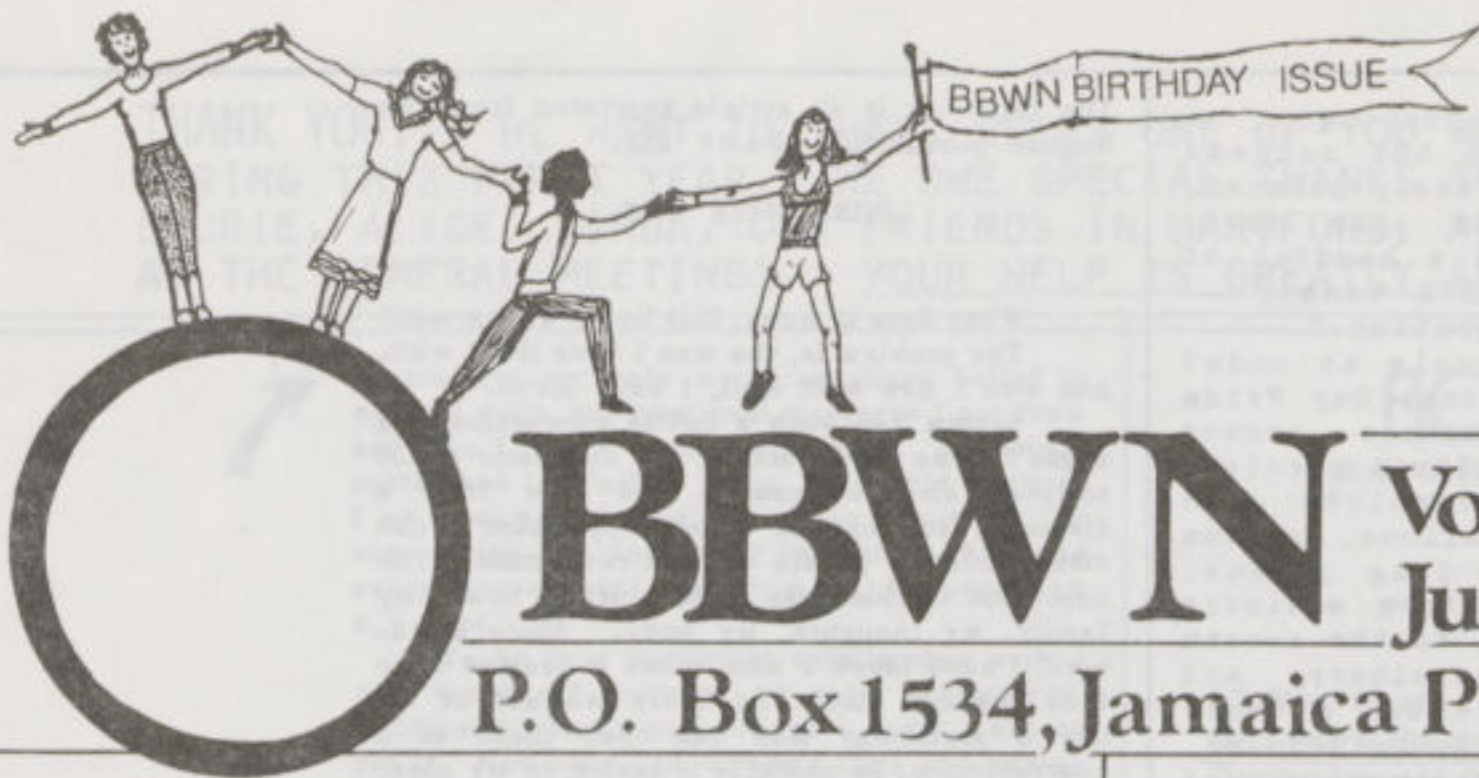
NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/ZIP: _____

TEL #: _____

I'D BE INTERESTED IN WORKING ON: _____



BBWN

Vol. 2, No. 4

July-August, 1984

P.O. Box 1534, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

Bisexual Woman

Who is the bisexual woman? If you keep up with contemporary mythology, you know that she is easily identified by her herpes sores. She has sexually transmitted diseases because she sleeps around, and she'll sleep with anyone. She's either confused about her sexuality or else she's in transition; in any event, she's not very stable and should be avoided until she makes up her mind, if ever. She's not committed to women at all. She can't commit to a relationship with a woman. She can't be monogamous. She's male identified. Her existence is the Achilles' heel of the women's community. She can't be trusted in love, friendship or politics. She's "passing" for straight in order to get the privileges that lesbians can't have. When she makes love to you she's wishing you had a penis. She's just marking time until "Mr. Right" comes along, and she'll marry him in a minute, forgetting all about what you meant to each other, slamming the closet door shut and throwing away the key.

More realistically, she doesn't necessarily fit the myths. She's the woman you met at the bar last night. She's the first feminist author you ever read. She's your lover. She's your plumber. She's your favorite musician. She was beside you at the protest rally last week. She's a poet who lived hundreds of years ago. She's an alcoholic. She's a doctor in the emergency room. She's a prostitute. She's your supervisor at work. She's your child's babysitter. She's the wife in the couple who had an ad in Swinger's Magazine. She's a suicide prevention hotline volunteer. She's your neighbor, your professor, your therapist, your sister. Your closest friend. She's the woman sleeping next to you. You've known her for 2 years and she never told you she was bi. Because: (pick one)

A) You told her she wasn't, and she decided not to argue the point. B) It never came up. C) She knows that if she tells you, pretty soon everyone will know. D) You told her that you thought screwing men was disgusting.

continued on page 6

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BBWN!!!

In September of 1982, an introductory meeting on bisexuality, held at The Cambridge Women's Center, helped eight women form a support group -- the Bivocals. Over the next six months, three more groups formed after similar meetings. The Bivocals invited these women and other bisexuals and lesbians to a party on May 7, 1983. Over forty women showed up. The mailing list was started that night, as people began to realize the importance of creating and maintaining this sense of community for bisexual women in the Boston area.

The founding meeting of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network was held on June 1, 1983. The thirty women attending hoped to create an organization that would offer women a safe environment in which to explore their bisexuality. It would offer the choice of participating in various groups -- support, discussion, educational, political action and social. They also wanted to build a network that would empower women by its work to gain full acceptance within the gay and straight communities. They decided that their first goal was to organize a contingent for Boston's 1983 Lesbian/Gay Pride March. Around twenty women and their many friends marched under the first bisexual banner -- "Gay Liberation is Our Liberation." Other summer accomplishments included the first Coordinating Committee meeting, where decisions are made about the Network's direction, and the first newsletter was printed.

continued on page 3

NEXT GENERAL MEETING: Wed. 7/25, 7:30 at Somewhere Else, second floor, 295 Franklin St., Boston. Four blocks from Washington St. stop on Red line. Discussion topic -- Stepping Out: Bisexuals in the Women's Bars.

NEXT CC MEETING: Sun. 7/29, 5:00 at Jean's, 1575 Beacon St., Brookline. Take Green line, C train. All members welcome. Bring ideas for fall events and groups.

The second annual BBWN contingent at The Gay Pride March was a hot success this year! Adorned in our newly printed, black muscle T-shirts (on sale now), about forty-five women and a handful of men marched behind the BBWN banner -- "Gay Liberation is Our Liberation."

An estimated 18,000 people attended the rally, said Marsha Levine, Gay Pride Coordinator. The atmosphere seemed different this year, more like a carnival than a political rally, complete with camel rides, a hot air balloon, cotton candy and some beautiful drag queens. Entertainment was a range from mediocre comedienne, Danny Williams, to the smooth and sultry voices of Casselberry and Dupree. In addition, there was a short preview of the new play, *Beebo Brinker*, speeches by City Councilman David Scodras, Mayor Flynn's Gay and Lesbian liaison, Ann Maguire and others. At our booth, we made contacts with the Daughters of Bilitis, BAGLY (Boston Action for Gay and Lesbian Youth), and other groups. We also handed out newsletters and answered questions.

For me, it was the first time in three years of marches that I felt like I belonged there. I could be supportive of the most effective gay public event of the year without compromising my sexual identity. This year's contingent also provided us all with an opportunity to show the gay community that yes, indeed, the bisexual community does exist and recognizes the extreme importance of supporting the fight against homophobia and heterosexism, which will make our fight easier.

BBWN has a lot to be proud of this year. Last year, nine members were struggling to get the message out and their contingent brought about twenty women and men into the march. Lisa O and her friend, John, made the banner. This year, BBWN boasts 267 on its mailing list. The numbers can speak for themselves.

A great deal of thanks should go to the people who helped to organize a successful brunch and march, especially to Sylvia for the T-shirts and organizing, to Cathy, Betty, Megan and to Kate (for entertainment at the booth). And thanks to everyone who attended our brunch and marched with us!

-----Betsy B



BETH WALSH

MASSAGE POLARITY

576-1493

(617) 623-7258

The following is an article reprinted from the English publication SPARE RIB.

LIVING WITH MEN

What does it mean, this living with a man?

The problem is, the men I have lived with, and who I live with still, I have loved.

Sexism can such a subtle oppression. It doesn't come from outside, the oppressor is not someone else, someone I can view from a distance, and against whose oppression I can dispassionately create my own revolution. The oppressor in this case is part of my home, my family, my thoughts, my body. Since I was born, I have loved a man, often it seemed more than anybody else. At every moment of my life a particular man has been there as a contradiction, an obstacle it seems, to my clear perception of what men do to women. Yes, they do it, but this man is different— my father, my brother, my lover. They infiltrate to my heart, and there is nothing wrong with my heart. I have loved men and do love men, and that is because men, like all humans, are infinitely lovable.

Then what about my revolution? I can be with a man, and perhaps there are rare moments when we can see each other clearly. Perhaps there are moments when sexism ceases to exist for us. Such moments can only be moments, because usually, we live inside our cultural patterns. Men have been taught from birth to oppress me, and I have been taught from birth to acquiesce in that. It would be ridiculous to suppose that the two of us could throw off the whole weight of our culture and be totally unaffected by the sexism rampant in every aspect of our society.

For many years I deluded myself that I was doing exactly that. Then I realised that such an undertaking would involve a lifetime of hard work, of constant vigilance, and conscious contradiction of all the patterns that force us continually back into the roles of oppressed and oppressor. Until society changes, I don't think its possible for any individual relationship between a man and a woman to defeat sexism. Therefore, my effort should go into changing society, should it not?

Much of my effort now goes into relating with one man. Living with a man means endlessly trying to work out whether my feelings are the justified result of oppression, or whether they are my own irrationality, not to be condoned but quickly dealt with. For years I have believed that if a man makes me feel bad, it must be my fault, and I should add guilt to my other feelings. That's what women are taught to do, which is very convenient for the oppressors. For me, it is a real contradiction to assume that if a man makes me feel bad, he is being sexist. It feels unfair to him that I should assume that.

However, sexual politics over the years proves to me that women's negative feelings almost always result from sexist oppression. Sexism affects our health, our cycles, our mothing, our thinking, all our internal processes, all the time. To contradict this oppression that so deeply affects our being means radically altering the way we relate to men. Radical change can be painful, but pain may be necessary for healing to take place.

To believe that I am not always in the wrong if I feel bad about the man I am with



THANK YOU!!! WE WANT TO THANK EVERY ONE OF YOU WHO HAS SUPPORTED BBWN DURING THIS FIRST YEAR. WE OWE SPECIAL THANKS TO ELAINE, BARB, SUSIE, LAURIE, ALICE, LINDA, OUR FRIENDS IN HARTFORD, AND ALL OF YOU WHO GAVE AT THE GENERAL MEETINGS. YOUR HELP IS GREATLY APPRECIATED.



contradicts not only my internalized belief in my own guilt, but continual messages I get from any man I relate to in the present. In various subtle and less subtle ways, I am told because I am a woman, I should be doing something for him, giving him something he lacks. Any and every man expects that from me, because I am a woman.

To be in a particular relationship with a man draws off much of my time and energy. Politically, that's just where I don't want to put it. Men have had women's time and energy in unlimited quantities for centuries, and they still have it. I subvert the revolution I believe in if I go on doing this. Every moment and every thought I give to a man could have been given to a woman. Men have to learn to do without being served by the oppressed. Is this where I withdraw my services?

In the matter of close relationships, a central issue is sex. Sex seems to be a magnet for our feelings of pain and fear. It's also the place where two people have the potential to be their closest. But it isn't very often like that, because the pain and fear they have already suffered stops them from really seeing or being with one another in the present.

Sex with a man is a very political act. Every time I give in, take second best, every time I'm not totally honest to the point of, in my terms, unkindness, I'm giving in to the oppression. Sex seems so desirable. I want it, I want to express love for this particular man, I feel passionate. I want something wonderful to happen that will draw us close together. Usually I am disappointed, and that hurts. And I say nothing because I've been taught that the ego of man is fragile, and the guilt is mine, and if anything stops him being there for me, then it's my job to make it better.

Back to the revolution...

Living with a man means not living with women. I reject marriage, I reject the nuclear family, I reject the couple relationship as the basic unit of capitalism. And yet because I have chosen to relate to a man, I find myself in a social and economic unit with one other adult—a man. Have I really rejected anything at all? If I really believe that the linchpin of capitalist society should be removed, if I'm really committed to ending sexism on which our whole societal structure is based, do I have to stop living with a man? It's possible.

It would hurt because I love him. That is why sexism is so hard to contradict. No other group of the oppressed are so emotionally intertwined with their oppressors, except children.

What do I need a man for? I have an alternative, which I have proved to satisfy my needs, to delight me, and to further my political cause. I have women. As I discover other women, I become aware of myself. I see the world through women's eyes, my own.

The ultimate contradiction to this aggressive and patriarchal culture is for women to love one another again and thus regain their

BODYWORKS

(A GYM EXCLUSIVELY FOR WOMEN)

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Cambridge, MA 02139



BBWN is looking for a file cabinet for our archives in the Cambridge Women's Center. Call 576-8612.

continued from page 1

In September of 1983, just a year after the Bivocals formed, the second BBWN general meeting was held at the Cambridge Women's Center. Expecting a handful of new faces, the organizers were overwhelmed when eighty women arrived to learn about the Network and to talk about bisexuality. Since then, BBWN has offered bi-monthly general meetings -- a chance for old members to discuss a selected topic for the evening and for newcomers to join a support group. The rapid growth of the mailing list, after that evening, has established the bi-monthly newsletter as an essential means of communication among bisexual women in Boston and throughout the country. Currently, there are close to 300 women on the mailing list and BBWN has a membership of nearly seventy-five.

Since that September meeting, BBWN has been very active. In addition to organizing its general meetings, support groups and newsletters, the Network has sponsored several parties and a social weekend in Provincetown. Two more weekend retreats are being planned for the summer. A study group was also formed to explore theoretical and political issues around bisexuality and radical feminism. BBWN has also worked for its visibility in the gay community. It is represented at monthly breakfast meetings where lesbian and gay groups discuss community issues. BBWN was also one of the sponsors of the rally for the new Human Rights ordinance. It was organized by the Boston Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance and was held at Faneuil Hall on June 7.

BBWN continues to grow. We are beginning our second year with exciting plans and goals. Help us make the most of this next year. Come and be a part of BBWN history.

-----Betty A. Cathy J

Study Group

Individuals who came together a month ago to discuss bisexuality and its relationship to radical feminism decided recently to begin a serious, regular study group on human sexuality and its social/political/psychological manifestations in our culture.

There are eight of us in the group. For all, understanding bisexuality, both in our own lives and in our society, is a primary goal. To this end, we decided on a format of readings and discussion, with a facilitator for each meeting, that would bring us through the range of sexual options available in the United States today, from male-identified heterosexuality to lesbianism, to a final informed examination of bisexuality in the context of all that we had learned. Throughout our exploration, feminism will provide both a point of departure, and a point of return.

We started by trying to define some terms, specifically "feminism", "gay-identified bisexual", and "bisexual". A lot of us were amazed to see how many different interpretations each term, especially "gay-identified", could have. Is someone "gay-identified" because they devote a majority of their time, energy and emotion to the gay community? Or does an individual's radical critique of heterosexuality make them "gay-identified"? And does "gay-identified" also imply "women-identified"? Some people felt that one could be gay-identified, and still not be woman-identified. And exactly how many Meg Christian concerts make you "lesbian-identified"?

We didn't reach any conclusions, but had fun realizing that being bisexuals, we are dealing with a whole realm of experiences that can be classified in any number of different ways; and that the variety of possible bisexual lifestyles is as varied as the women who are in the Network.

That was the first meeting. During the second meeting we discussed an article that each of us had read, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience", by Adrienne Rich. In it, Rich critiques several well-known works by women, including *THE MERMAID AND THE MINOTAUR* by Dorothy Dinnerstein, *TOWARD A NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF WOMEN* by Jean Baker Miller, and *FOR HER OWN GOOD* by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English. Her argument is compelling; although each book contributes in its own way to a feminist understanding of the relation between men and women, both the fact of lesbian existence and the political significance of heterosexuality are never analyzed to the extent that they might have been, considering the profound implications one could draw from such an analysis.

Rich goes on to sketch that analysis herself. To understand patriarchy in the fullest possible way, Rich argues, one must understand the function of heterosexuality in our society as one of the mechanisms whereby men exert control over women, and in turn, male power in other areas of society contributes in fundamental ways to the enforcement of heterosexual sex for women.

She discusses the eroticization of woman's subordination, and the contribution of pornography in linking sexuality and violence against women as essential aspects of male sexuality. If this is true, if male eroticism is linked to violence against women, and violence itself has been "eroticized", what can be the essential distinction between ordinary heterosexual sex and rape? Are they not simply different ends of exactly the same spectrum? Rich cites another feminist, Catherine MacKinnon, who argues that, "taking rape from the realm of the sexual and placing it in the realm of the violent allows one to be against it without raising any questions about the extent to which the institution of heterosexuality has defined force as a normal part of its activity."

Men must have access to women to expend their sexuality. In a male-dominated society, women are forced through a myriad of intertwining social and political conventions to make themselves continually available to men sexually. Rich says, "The male need to control women seems not to result so much from a fear that women will devour them, or overwhelm them with sexual appetite, but that women could be indifferent to them altogether, that men could be allowed sexual and emotional access to women ONLY ON WOMEN'S TERMS, otherwise being left on the periphery." In this context, it is easy to follow Rich's discussion of lesbianism as the most threatening revolt against male supremacy, because it suggests that women MAY NOT ALLOW MEN ACCESS, sexually, or otherwise.

In her book *FEMALE SEXUAL SLAVERY*, Kathleen Barry writes the following:

"Considering the arrested development that is understood to be normal in the male population, and considering the number of men who are pimps, procurers, members of slavery gangs, rapists, owners of brothels, consumers of pornography, wife beaters, and child molesters, one cannot but be momentarily stunned by the enormous male population engaged in female sexual slavery. The huge number of men engaged in these practices should be cause for declaration of an international emergency, a crisis in sexual violence. But what should be cause for alarm is instead accepted as normal sexual intercourse."

Discussion of this article was meaningful and important for each of us, I think.

The study group will be meeting on a monthly basis in the evenings from now on. It is NOT a closed group, although people who are newcomers should be prepared to feel a little left out of the first meeting they attend, since our discussions focus on readings arranged from the previous meeting. After one time, you can easily catch up, however. The emphasis is on theoretical discussions, with examples from personal experience, although the group does NOT function as a support group. If you want details, or would like to join, call me at 623-5443.

—Barb H

Amy Rothstein
232-4156

HAIR DESIGN



The flyers for the New Hampshire Bisexual retreat to be held on the first weekend in August, sponsored by the Boston men's bisexual network, the Hartford Bisexual Network, and the BBWN, have been mailed, and should be in everyone's hands by now. Proceeds from the retreat will be split between the three sponsoring groups.

The BBWN T-shirts have finally been perfected, and will be ready for display on bodies throughout greater Boston in time for the June 16 Gay Pride March. They are beautiful, and unique! Cost is \$7.00 and you can send a check to the BBWN PO Box or pick them up at the march. We ordered 51, at a cost to the Network of about \$185.00

Treasurer's Report— Excluding expenses for this newsletter, and the T-shirts, we have \$357.00 in the bank.

It was decided that the BBWN will organize a series of evenings focused on topical issues of concern to bisexual women. The format for each would include a speaker of special interest, or a BBWN facilitator, and group discussions. Although they will not start until September, planning will occur much earlier. If you want to help plan, or know of an interesting speaker, write the PO Box. Suggested topics could include lesbianism, child-rearing, relationships, feminism, and political issues. These would be in addition to our general meetings, which will continue to provide an introduction to the Network for newcomers, discussions of bisexuality and bisexual lifestyle, and announcements of network meetings and events. WATCH FOR THEM!

A rather spirited discussion occurred when the question was posed whether or not we should allow various random men, or men in general, onto the BBWN mailing list. (Someone who is on the mailing list receives not only the newsletter, but all announcements of parties and special events) Several people felt that the BBWN is a WOMEN's Network, and that we should be extremely selective about men we include in our "community". Others felt that the newsletter is an educational tool about bisexuality and should be spread around to as many people as possible. For the present, pending further discussion, the several men who are on the list from the men's network will remain, and other men to be added will be considered on an individual basis.

It was agreed that, for the present, we will NOT charge for out of state newsletter subscriptions.

We are now a year old! June 1, 1983, thirty women attended BBWN's founding meeting. They hoped to create a supportive, social, educational and political network for bisexual women in the Boston area. Reviewing our first year in the article on our history, we see the realities of those hopes: ongoing support groups, parties, a study group, political action. Most importantly, we see that BBWN has gained recognition in both the gay and straight communities. In addition, we inspired the bisexual men to organize their own network. In a year, we have created our own space, a bisexual community.

This community is also becoming instrumental in building a wider bisexual community. In March, BBWN was invited to the first New England Regional Conference on Bisexuality for women and men, in Hartford. It was a chance to network with groups from other states. This has led to a collaborative effort to organize the August weekend retreat in New Hampshire. It will be there that initial plans will be made to prepare for the second regional conference, hopefully to be held in Boston.

In one year, we have come a long way. So, not only is it time to celebrate, it is also a time to say thanks. Thank you to our founding mothers for their dreams, initiative and hard work, to the many women who have contributed in their own ways to nurture the Network and to every woman for her BBWN affiliation and participation in our growing community. Together, we are gaining recognition. Congratulations, BBWN and Happy Birthday! -----Betty A. Cathy J

TELEPHONE (617) 498-9923

BET MACARTHUR, ACSW LICSW
COUNSELING, PSYCHOTHERAPY
CONSULTATION & TRAINING

14 PLEASANT ST.
CENTRAL SQUARE
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

We welcome everyone to submit articles, letters and thoughts. Also, send us your comments and suggestions about the newsletter. We need your feedback. Deadline for the next issue is August 15.

Do you have any plans for August 3rd, 4th or 5th? How about thinking about joining bisexual women and men (and their families and friends) for a get-away weekend at Another Place in Greenville, N.H. There are many activities being planned for the weekend, such as discussion groups, meditation, yoga, hiking, swimming, music, etc. It will be a great opportunity to meet other BBWN members and women from all over New England and bisexual men from the men's network recently formed in Boston. The registration deadline has been extended beyond July 1. For more information call Betty at 731-1399.

6 BBWN Retreat

A WOMEN'S WEEKEND AWAY IN THE WOODS !!!!!

We have the use of a lovely three bedroom house in Waterville Valley, N.H. for Friday to Sunday, July 13-15. It is less than a three hour drive up Rte. 93. National forrest parkland surrounds the Valley with hiking trails, and rivers to swim in. Golf and tennis available for a fee. Beds for ten women!

the cost is \$30.00, including food. A \$15.00 non-refundable deposit must be sent to me in advance so I can buy food. There is a large living room, dining room, fireplace, and porch. We will cook together there. B.Y.O.B. No smoking inside the house. Call about sharing rides. Send deposit to [redacted] at [redacted] For more info, call [redacted] at [redacted] or work at [redacted] [redacted] be discrete. Come join the fun!!!!!!

A BBWN binder is now available to all women in the reference room at the Cambridge Women's Center. In addition to information on the Network, it contains copies of all previous newsletters. Let us know if you think anything else should be added.

continued from page 1

E) You told her you thought men were disgusting. F) You told her you thought bisexuals were disgusting. G) She's afraid of what will happen if she tells you. H) She knows what will happen if she tells you. I) It's none of your business. J) Every time she tried to tell you you'd change the subject.

How many bisexual lesbians are there? Nobody knows, because they can't tell people in the straight community about their lesbian selves, and they can't tell people in the lesbian community about their straight selves. Because their silence keeps them from being aware of and/or forming a bisexual community, it's hard to even estimate how many there are.

But here's one way for you to guess how many bisexual women exist in the lesbian community: The next time you find yourself surrounded by lesbians, at a workshop, a bar, a party, a dance, a benefit, a rally, a rap group, a class, ask yourself how many women would still be there if all the bisexual lesbians got up and left. Ask yourself what would happen if all the bisexual lesbians removed their names from the petitions, removed their dollars from the lesbian community, removed their donated time from the causes, removed their voices from the literature, removed their bodies from the beds.

It's just a hypothetical situation, since bisexual lesbians are a large and irremovable part of the lesbian community, even if many lesbians treat them with insults, ignorance, stereotyping, exclusion, rejection, invalidation, and, worst of all, silence.

R. Drew

San Francisco

Reprinted from Plexus, August 1983 -
Letters to the Editor

continued from page 3

power. They are doing it in situations where the full force of male power and paranoia is aligned against them, and if under these circumstances we still continue to contradict such values with our own perception of this Earth, then our revolution is inevitable.

So what about this man that I love? What about every woman who loves a man, and wants to be with him and support him as one human supports another? All I know now is that I am changing as the world changes. I am part of this revolution. Each person is political, and so my role in this overthrow of sexism is crucial. So now I can't say to any man that I will live with them happily ever after. I shall eventually go where my politics takes me. It lends a poignancy to my relationship. Perhaps our daughters and sons will be able to see each other as they are, if we further this revolution for them. It won't be possible if we allow sexism to continue.

The part that hurts me is that I won't stop loving particular men. However, I think that such pain is necessary, because we are aiming for a world in which oppression will cease to exist, and we must expect that eventually all human beings will be acceptable to one another. Men will no longer be the oppressors; there will ideally be no oppressors. The hardest part is to believe that the revolution will not be complete until every man has understood what women are saying and has renounced his own sexism, and all the privileges it brings.

—Margaret Elphinstone

Political Action News

The BBWN is now being represented at the Boston Gay & Lesbian Political Alliance community networking breakfast each month. The BGLPA sponsors this meeting for representatives of many local lesbian/gay groups & organizations. We were very pleased to be invited to participate in this monthly event because it indicates an acceptance and an effort to involve us in the gay community.

The breakfasts are held at The Club Cafe. About fifty people attended each of the last two meetings. The format includes introductions, a speaker and time for announcements about events, meetings, conferences, new groups and news of interest to the gay community. Kate K and Betsey B attended the April meeting where members of DIGNITY, a Catholic-based gay organization, spoke and answered questions. Betty A and Kate K attended the May meeting where staff from the Human Rights Fund gave a presentation on fundraising for political candidates.

This is a fine validation of the network and an important opportunity for us to be visible in the gay community. We would like other members to have the chance to participate as BBWN representatives. The breakfasts are held at 8:00 AM on a Wednesday. If you are a BBWN member and would like to represent us at one of the breakfasts, please call Kate at 576-2455.

-----Kate K

SURVEY RESULTS - PART II

Following is Part II of a summary of the results of the mail survey of our members conducted in March.

Identity: Of the 64 respondents, 62 consider themselves bisexual. Of these, 25 (40.3%) identify as gay; 13 (21%) do not; 19 (30.6%) are unsure, and 4 (6.4%) did not answer this question. 20 (32.3%) identify as lesbian; 28 (45.2%) do not; 10 (16.1%) are unsure, and 4 (6.5%) gave no response.

Lifestyle: 16 of the 64 respondents (25%) have been married at some point. 6 (9.4%) are currently married. 7 (10.9%) are mothers; 56 (90.1%) are not. Of these, 12 (21%) definitely want children someday; 15 (26.3%) do not; 6 (10.5%) probably do; 11 (19.3%) probably do not; 13 (22.8%) are unsure. 75% of these respondents felt they would need to be in a primary relationship before choosing to have children. Most women have no preference as to their parenting partner's gender.

Politics: 62 of the 64 respondents are registered to vote. Of these, 40 (62.5%) are registered Democrats, 20 (31.3%) are registered Independents; 1 (1.6%) is a registered Republican, and 1 did not answer the question. Question 29 asked "How would you describe your political position?"

Response:

Conservative					Radical		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
N=0	1	1	4	15	24	18	
%=0	1.6	1.6	6.3	23.4	37.5	28.1	

BBWN Goals: And what would you like to see BBWN involved in? The responses were so varied that it was difficult to detect a clear pattern. The two most frequent first choices were support groups and increasing awareness among gays. Parties, potlucks, and increasing awareness among straights followed close behind. Write in suggestions included: conferences, open seminars, workshops and lectures, study groups, political action, involvement in gay groups such as the Gay Speakers Bureau, national/international networking, weekend retreats, dances, athletic events, regular social events, and song nights.

Note: If anyone has access to computertime and would like to do a statistical analysis of the data we've collected, please leave a message for Robyn at 576-8612, or write her c/o BBWN.

BBWN Calendar July/August

July 4: Watch the fireworks on the Charles River at a fundraiser for Community Boating - entertainment provided by BBWN's own Suzie Schoonmaker and band!! \$10.00 - Proceeds to Community Boating. 4pm-11pm.

July 12: Boston Men's Bisexual Network invites the BBWN to a pot luck dinner. 8 pm. Arlington Street Church. For more Info: Norman 247-3047.

July 13-15: BBWN retreat!!! Waterville Valley, NH. \$30.00 per person. For more Info: Jean 739-2963 (home).

July 20-22: WOMANSPLACE - RFD 3, Box 206a, Plymouth, NH 03264. Summer sojourns for women: Hiking, meditation, outdoor workshops. Meals and lodging included: \$95.00 per person For more Info: Stephanie 783-8030 (days)

July 27: The EURHYTHMICS (New Wave). Concerts on the Common. 6 pm \$11.50-16.50.

July 29: BBWN Coordinating Committee Meeting All Members Welcome! Jean's house. 1676 Beacon Street, 5:00.

Aug. 3-5: SUMMER WEEKEND RETREAT!! Sponsored by the Ad Hoc Regional Committee on Bisexuality. ANOTHER PLACE - Greenville, NH. \$50.00 weekend per person, Bed and Meals. \$40.00 weekend per person, Camping and Meals For more info: Norman 247-3047.

Aug. 10: Ella Fitzgerald and Oscar Peterson (Jazz). Concert on the Common 6pm. \$11.50-16.50.

Aug. 18: BBWN Beach Day. Call for details.

Note: Please send your calendar listings in! P.O. Box 1534, Jamaica Plain 02130. all listings that fit will be printed. thanks.

NEWSLETTER STAFF: Cathy J, Betty A, editors. Betsy B, Barb H, Kate K, Elissa M, Megan M, Lucinda O, Sylvia S, Robyn T & Jean K.

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8 Readers' Forum

Dear BBWN,

I am perplexed, angry and just generally bummed out. Last Wednesday night after the general meeting a group of us went to the Marquis to have a drink and dance a little. As a bisexual, I don't mind being in 'mixed' bars, but there is a certain special feeling about being in a bar catering to women only.

The other night I was dancing at the Marquis feeling a little irritated with their choice of music when suddenly my ears caught one line of the song. It was a male singer and he was singing, "She jerked me off just the way I liked it." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I had to walk off the dance floor. I felt disgusted. I wouldn't put up with that kind of verbal abuse (and it feels like verbal abuse) in any kind of club, but in a club that is supposed to be women oriented, it feels particularly offensive. I go to women's clubs so I can get away from that kind of trash.

Why do women feel that they have to allow themselves to be degraded by listening to this kind of stuff in environments that have supposedly been created as a safe place for us to go? A place where we can feel good about ourselves as women and not be exposed to men's sexual desires. A place where we can recognize that we are human beings worthy of being treated with respect and not just men's sexual playthings.

I may sound really angry, but only because I am. Where can I go to socialize and dance and not be bombarded with this kind of garbage?

Where is Betsy's, Holly's, Meg's, Cris', Tret's, and Ferron's music being played? If we don't support our own musicians in our own clubs well....

I would like to hear from other women who have experienced similar feelings about the music played in women's clubs.

-----Where Am I Safe

New group of sober, drug-free, bisexual women + men is looking for new members. Meets every Friday, 7:30-8:30. Call Janet C. @ 625-8989

Dear BBWN,

Last weekend I walked out of a movie theater shaking with shock and anger. I felt like screaming at the audience and crying out my pain. The movie was "Once Upon A Time In America" and a full theater of people sat and watched two rapes and several gory fights. The second rape was more than I could take and I left.

The film follows a gang of poor Jewish boys in N.Y.C. in the depression, from childish pranks through adolescence to violent crimes in adulthood. The first rape is during a robbery staged by the gang in which a woman employee of the place being robbed, is an informed accomplice. The gang beats up the others, all men, and heads for the safe. She corners one of them and begs him to slap her so the others don't suspect her involvement with the gang. He does, then throws her over a table and brutally rapes her ass. She had literally "asked for it" implying women want to be abused. It upset me more because it was as almost an afterthought, no big deal. Years later, now a whore, she meets the gang again and seductively coos "I have only known one of you intimately." Not only is she denied her anger, the authors ignore her sense of violation. She is even cordial to them. The second rape was just as bad.

Hollywood movies depress me. I know women don't want to be raped and dominated. I know men do not want their masculinity challenged when they are loving and gentle. I want to see more positive, human images created in the media showing us the best of what we are as a society, and who we might be. It makes me very sad to see these images financed, produced, and supported by several name actors and actresses and film companies. I only hope more women move into powerful positions in film and other media before more damage is done.

-- Jean K.

NEW WORDS

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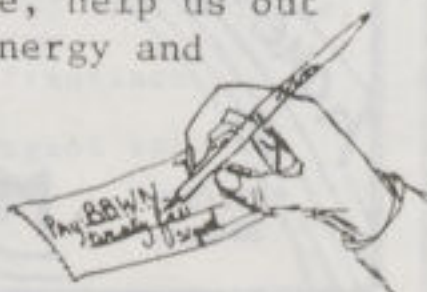
Women-identified bi lkg. to share apt. w/ 1 or 2 bi/lesb/fem women. Prefer no pets. I am non-veg. and considerate smoker. Walking dist. to red or green line. Need parking. Call Betty @ 731-1399

Women 21 & under, interested in forming support group? Call Laurie at 625-8388.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BBWN!!!

In celebration of our first year, please send BBWN your birthday gift. We have grown from a small group of 8 to over 270 women. We are still growing, but so are our costs. We rely on your support and contributions. We also rely on your participation. We are all volunteers who give our time to the newsletter, meetings and projects. Please, help us out with you checks, ideas, energy and

FEEDBACK!



Yes! Sign me up! I want to be a:
☐ Contributing Member (\$25)
☐ Regular Member (\$10)
☐ Truly needy member (\$5)
 (make checks to BBWN) THANK YOU!

NAME: _____

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I'D BE INTERESTED IN WORKING ON: _____



BBWN

September-October, 1984
Vol. 2, No. 5 P.O. Box 1534, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

The newsletter of The Boston Bisexual Women's Network

Happy Trails to Lisa!

(a personal/political announcement)

When the eight What-Was-To-Become-Bivocals met for the first time in September of 1982, two of us had already been meeting for the previous year. One of our projects had been to try to contact this "Lisa Orlando" (a great pen name, I had assumed, who had written letters in support of gay-identified bisexuality to GCN. One, dated April 24, was put under the title "Let Bi Girls Be Bi Girls!") We wanted to shout, "Look here -- here we are! There are actually eight more bisexual women in the Boston area! You are not alone!" We did finally meet, at the September 1982 meeting which became the first Bivocals meeting. So, knowing that the BBWN mailing list is now over 300, I have to chuckle. I doubt that they're all disinterested sociologists... It was a teary farewell on June 16, 1984, at the esplanade fireworks display (we knew it was just for Gay Pride Day and Lisa's send-off party!)

In the interim, we had gotten to know Lisa as the bottomless supply of energy, love, outrage and ideas that she is. We've all met amazing women in the BBWN, but Lisa was a true pioneer of the area's bisexual women's liberation movement.

In "real life," she writes about sexual politics, and her contributions (in the Village Voice and the Phoenix, among others) have been original, daring and intellectually well-informed. But they have been informed as well by her fifteen-plus years in the women's community. (As another mid-thirty-year-old feminist, I am glad that our experience has brought us here today -- it's been worth it!)

So as she reads this from California (she didn't have to take being a "pioneer" so seriously!), I wish to say, on behalf of all who know and love her, "Here we are! Increasing exponentially on the East Coast. Send reports, and be as proud of us as we are of you. Good-bi, until we meet again."

Love, Marcia D

NEXT C.C. MEETING

The next BBWN Co-ordinating Committee meeting will be held Sunday, September 30 at 5:00 PM. Barb H has offered the use of her apartment in Jamaica Plain at 71 Paul Gore St. which is on the JP green line and just off Centre St. All BBWN members are invited to attend.

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE APPEARED IN ALAN RICHMAN'S COLUMN IN THE BOSTON GLOBE ON JULY 26.

A DATING DILEMMA

"You're so dumb", my friend said. I agreed. "Anybody else would have known." I nodded miserably. Certainly, there were hints. Not the first time we met, but throughout dinner.

During the bluefish marinated in tamari, the woman told me she met her last boyfriend in a gay bar. While sharing dessert, I learned about her adult education class in auto mechanics.

Anybody but me would have figured it out.

"What did you do when she told you she was bisexual?" my friend asked.

I remember clearly.

I gulped.

"Do you know what you were doing?"

I hung my head.

"You were imposing you male sexist judgements hopelessly formed in the early '60s."

I wasn't sure what that meant, but it sure sounded like something I would do.

The woman I took to dinner was just like other women I've taken to dinner. We talked about sensitive stuff, like Robert Brustein and day care centers.

We were having a pretty good time until the woman said something that chilled me.

She said, "There's something about me you ought to know."

I've heard that from a woman before. It's never something I want to know. Usually, they turn out to be vegetarians and ruin dinner by talking about little baby veals locked up in barns.

When she told me she was a bisexual, she seemed so pleased with herself she nearly burst the buttons on her very feminine dress.

continued on page 2

NEXT GENERAL MEETING

The next General Meeting of the BBWN will be held at Somewhere Else, 295 Franklin St., Boston on Monday, September 24 at 7:00 PM. The general topic for discussion will be "Bisexuality and Feminism." Somewhere Else is a woman's space and easily accessible by T. Take the green line to Government Center; the blue line to Aquarium, or the orange line to State St. Hope to see you there.

continued from page 1

She wasn't just a bisexual. She was a born-again bisexual. She had found her true calling.

I tried to act enthusiastic, but it didn't work. We were alone, but I felt as though we were out on a double date.

She said she was disappointed in me.

"I'm usually so surrounded by people who are gay, bi, or cool about it that when I run across a non-cool response, I'm surprised," she said.

It's true. I wasn't cool. I didn't even handle it well when Miss America started fooling around with a woman in Penthouse magazine.

A few days later, I sat down with my friend and told her all about the dinner date. My friend advised me not to get involved with this woman.

"You'll get hurt," she said.

I told her the woman was very nice.

"With bisexuals," my friend said, "the person of the opposite sex is just an experiment while they're between real lovers of the same sex."

My friend, who is 28, knows everything.

She said that if I had gone to college in the early '70s, when she did, I would know everything too.

At her upstate New York college, she took women's studies classes. She was taught that all women were basically bisexual and have been socialized into believing that they should only like men. She learned that women should sleep with each other.

She told me that in college she lived with a guy named Rex and had a beautiful friend named Ingrid. She thought Rex loved her. She thought Ingrid was a lesbian. She found out Rex wanted to sleep with Ingrid and Ingrid wanted to sleep with Rex. Later, Ingrid changed her mind and wanted to sleep with her. I gulped again.

My friend said times had changed and women's studies classes no longer insisted that all women were bisexual. She said it was now OK for women to have women as friends.

"It's bad enough to feel insecure with half the population," she said. "There should be one gender you can go out for pizza with."

I haven't gone out with the bisexual woman again. We were supposed to get together earlier this week, but she called to tell me her spiritual advisor was in town and she wanted to spend the evening with her. ↗

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LESLIE LAWRENCE

↗ I suggested another day, but the woman said she would be busy tinkering with an internal combustion engine.

She said she was looking forward to seeing me again.

I believed her.

"You're so dumb," my friend said.

THE FOLLOWING LETTER WAS SENT TO THE BOSTON GLOBE AS A RESPONSE TO THE COLUMN.

To the Editor:

Thanks to Alan Richman for raising the issue of bisexuality in his July 26 column, "A Dating Dilemma". It's about time we recognize that many of us choose important love relationships with members of both genders.

Unfortunately, Richman's depiction of his first date with a bisexual woman veers into clichés rooted in sexism and homophobia.

Richman says his date announced her bisexuality with obvious pride, "nearly burst(ing) the buttons on her very feminine dress".

Her pride is deserved. Bisexual women are making courageous choices to transcend traditional models of closeness and "femininity". We proudly wear dresses, fix cars, raise children, and program computers. We proudly love women and love men.

Richman describes bisexuals as untrustworthy ("the opposite sex is just an experiment") and schizophrenic ("I felt as though we were out on a double date").

Bisexuals are a decisive, committed, loving, and lovable as anyone else.

Richman's confidante advises him not to "get involved" with his bisexual friend.

Here's our advice for Richman's second night out: ask your date what it's been like to be bisexual. Ask her about the stereotypes she's faced, the discrimination at work (if she's out), or the frightening reactions of those who were friends. Ask her what it's like to be a pioneer, challenging rules that limit everyone.

Then you'll see what pride's about.

SIGNED BY ELEVEN MEMBERS OF BBWN, INCLUDING SIX MEMBERS OF THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE.

Androgyny and femininity were two topics discussed in detail at the last meeting of the Sexuality Study Group. About ten network members attended this fourth meeting; the group began in response to the need for more in-depth analysis of bisexuality.

We had assigned ourselves two readings from the previous meeting: a chapter from Andrea Dworkin's WOMAN HATING entitled "Androgyny: The Mythical Model"; and a chapter from Susan Brownmiller's controversial FEMININITY.

The Dworkin article was discussed first. In it, Dworkin makes a convincing case for a definition of human sexuality that is very different from our conditioned perception of two distinct biological sexes, male and female. Citing examples of ancient myth from Tibet, Egypt, and Hindu, Dworkin states that androgyny, or the state of encompassing both male and female sexuality in one living creature, is the most natural and fundamental human sexuality. To greater or lesser degrees, each of us contains the biological and psychological capacity for androgyny. Dworkin goes on to point out that cultural enforcement of male/female sexuality (which has translated itself throughout history into male dominance and female submission), has diminished our awareness of this aspect of our sexuality.

Her argument is compelling. She cites six different methods of defining sexuality: genetic sex (revealed by chromosomes); hormonal sex; gonadal sex (ovarian or testicular); internal reproductive sex; external genital sex; and psychological or emotional sex. She also gives examples of cases where both male and female organs have occurred in the same individual. "From these definitions," Dworkin says, "it is clear that we are justified in making a radical new formulation of the nature of human sexuality. We are clearly a multi-sexed species which has its sexuality spread along a vast fluid spectrum where the elements called male and female are not discrete."

What are the implications, once we accept this view of human sexuality? Rather than an oppressive and strictly enforced role of male/female bonding, we could imagine "sex as a community between humans" -- that is, sexuality that is broadly and freely expressed, unlimited by cultural "norms". Dworkin gives examples of types of sex that are limited or prohibited by our society -- bestiality, incest, transsexuality, homosexuality, and eroticism with children -- and raises the question of why ANY sexuality should be taboo in an ideal community where individual androgyny is understood and accepted. "The growth of tribe is part of the process of destroying particularized roles and fixed erotic identity. As people develop fluid androgynous identity, they will also develop the forms of community appropriate to it. What those forms are we cannot really yet imagine."

continued on page 7

Time was I saw a pretty woman and could pretend
that love was bubbly and blonde as champagne.
Like when my older sister got married
and I got tipsy and had a two hour romance
with my new brother-in-law's old friend,
who was short haired and handsome
as an ad for shaving creme.
But even then some fear crept in
because he spoke of Vietnam,
and one of the older men got drunk
and whispered in my face,
"How pretty you look, Nancy."
Two months later my parents divorced
telling us sometimes love is just some sad mistake.
Four months after that my hero
got his foot shot off, but he kept his rank:
so, even then some fear crept in.
Time was I saw a pretty woman
and disasters never crossed my mind,
no land mines waited for the failure
of my grown up feet.
Like the time I went to overnight camp
and got twin crushes on a boy and a girl.
I was thin and tanned, my pimples were covered,
but even then my period came too soon
and some girl gossiped that I smoked and drank,
which was a terrible thing,
even worse than my real smoking now.
Time was I saw a pretty woman naked in the glass
and I admired her pale new breasts.
But now I am afraid to explore them,
too many women I know have lost them.
I lie down at night with the fear in my fingers.
I wake up with the fear in my chest.
I still see pretty women,
and may even still be one,
but I no longer pretend, naked or clothed,
or even when I'm high,
that love is anything but a very sober story.

-----WRITTEN BY JESS MAVRO

FIRST PLACE IN 1983 GAY/FEMINIST

POETRY CONTEST:

Reprinted from EIDOS-EROTICA FOR WOMEN

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BETH WALSH

MASSAGE & POLARITY

576-1493

(617) 623-7255

In a previous issue of a BBWN newsletter, we launched Bi-The-Way, which provides readers with a space to send in your personal questions, dilemmas, resource searches and puzzles of life. Our therapist consultant, Bet MacArthur, LICSW, is a psychotherapist in Cambridge. Please take a risk and send in your questions for all of us to learn from.

Bi The Way

Letter said:

"Dear Bi the Way: For 6 years I've spent most of my time and energy with women, but occasionally I'm sexually attracted to a man. Although I rarely notice 'men in the street,' I sometimes meet a man I like and then I want to have sex with him. When it happens I usually enjoy it and hetero sex often seems 'easier' than sex with women. Basically I don't want a male lover because I consider myself a radical feminist and I don't want to deal with male/female power dynamics, so I'm disturbed by my sexual feelings and what I sometimes regard as a sexual preference for men. Any advice?" -- Am "Bi"valent

Response:

Do you have to choose between political needs and personal taste? Whether you are lesbian, bisexual, or straight, your occasional attraction to someone different is not at all abnormal. Meeting someone you like and wanting to share and be closer with him is also perfectly normal. How you define your terms, and then how you rank your values will tell you whether or not it's okay to have occasional sex, and with whom it's okay. Do that homework! If your ongoing relationships with specific, individual women are being affected by the conflict you describe, some work on how you manage commitment is in order. If you are availing ongoing relationships with males because of "power dynamics," get to work on your self-esteem and your assertion skills, so that no one (woman or man) can run you around.

BODYWORKS



MARGARITA ASCENCIO
576-1493

53 RIVER STREET, CAMBRIDGE, NR CENTRAL SQUARE ①

Support Group

The BBWN would like to start keeping track of how many support groups are in existence, how many people in the network are in support groups, and how long the groups have been meeting. Would each group please have someone call Susan S at 576-8612 and let the network know you as a group exist and whether or not you are open to new members.

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YOU ARE INVITED TO
A MONDALE/FERRARO FUND-RAISING PARTY
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\$10 truly needy \$15 regular \$25 supporting
CALL 576-8612 for reservations.....for
location and other information..to volunteer
or make early donations for the party.....

Sponsored by Megan H., Sylvia S., and Joanna A., who support the MONDALE/FERRARO ticket BECAUSE it has a female VP and favors the ERA, reproductive choice, minority rights, the nuclear freeze, arms control initiatives, AND BECAUSE if Reagan wins, he will continue to fight the ERA and reproductive choice, to cut social programs while wasting billions on weaponry and avoiding arms control..... AND BECAUSE the next President will appoint several new Supreme Court Justices which will affect the tone and tolerance of our justice system for decades to come.....

JOIN US AT THE MONDALE/FERRARO FUNDRAISER PARTY
Bring girlfriends, boyfriends, everyone! R.S.V.P.

Bi Retreat

This past Friday, August 3, I left my crowded, muggy, urban neighborhood and drove to a large farmhouse in rural New Hampshire. The farmhouse, called 'Another Place,' owned by a New Age collective, was to be the setting for a super weekend retreat sponsored by the Ad Hoc Regional Committee on Bisexuality.

Friday night was a time for the retreat participants to get acquainted. We ate a vegetarian dinner together and then had a general meeting to formally introduce ourselves and plan the structure for the weekend's activities. As I looked around the room during the meeting, I was pleased to see that the group contained approximately equal numbers of men and women. It was also good to hear that, in addition to Boston area residents, there were people at the retreat who had come from other parts of New England, including Hartford, Connecticut; Burlington, Vermont; and Amherst, Massachusetts. I went to bed Friday night feeling anxious for Saturday to arrive and looking forward to the weekend's activities.

Saturday proved to be the time when we really started to get to know each other. I attended group discussions on Monogamy versus Non-monogamy, on Being a Woman-identified Bisexual Woman, and one on the issue of separatism. Other groups

pg 7

WE KNOW YOU KNOW

that SOJOURNER is Boston's women's newspaper. But do you subscribe? If so, then you get the paper much faster—and give us much-needed support. So why not arrange to get the news, calendar listings, and other wonderful things we offer before they're available on newsstands? Just send your name and address (and \$11) to: SOJOURNER, 143 Albany St., Cambridge, MA 02139. Your writing, photos, and ads are also welcome, of course; just call 661-3567 for details.

~~Boston~~

BOSTON BISEXUAL WOMEN'S NETWORK

Discussion Series • Topics are:

Having Children • October 3 at Somewhere Else,
2nd Floor; 245 Franklin Street, Boston

Pornography & Erotica • November 7 in Basement
below New Words Bookstore; 186 Hampshire
Street, Cambridge

Classism & Racism • December 5 at Somewhere
Else, 2nd Floor; 245 Franklin Street, Boston

All discussions start at 7pm.

For more info:
call 576-8612

mh'84

The BBWN is experiencing some growing pains. In an attempt to address the needs of all bisexual women - the coordinating committee has discussed concerns such as - how to meet the needs of women newly identifying as bisexual as well as those looking for a more in depth discussion, as well as Business vs. Fun, Money vs. Policy, etc. Another frequent concern is how closely the BBWN will be associated with men and men's groups. Do we want to include any man's name on the mailing list at the risk of 'kinky intent'? Do we want to sell BBWN T-Shirts to anyone regardless of the association? etc. etc...

It is this issue, our relationship with men, that we would like to address. BBWN, like any new organization, has a tendency towards exclusivity - a 'protection instinct.' If we look at the Gay/Lesbian community, men and women split to safely develop their own identity - and for good reason - men's and women's issues are clearly different, although, face the same oppression from the straight society.

However, the nature of Bisexuality encourages ideally a non judgmental attitude which puts us in a difficult position (no one said it would be easy.) There are as many definitions of bisexuality as there are bisexuals, whether we like it or not.

Although there is clearly a need for women's space, in fighting exclusivity the BBWN should encourage support from women and men, bisexual or not, to wear our T-shirts with pride, encourage supportive men to be on the mailing list, for supportive men to send us their dollars.

It is much more risky to be open to everyone - with all lifestyles and sexual orientations - but that's the beauty and the curse of a bisexual identity.

Finally, the coordinating committee is where all these interesting discussions can be witnessed! Participate! Your voice is important...

NOTE: This editorial is the opinion of the editors, and is not necessarily representative of BBWN.

-----Charnan B, Betty A

NEWSLETTER STAFF-Betty A. + Charnan B., co-editors
Barb H., Cathy J., Carol C., Carole S., Elissa M.,
Jean K., Jody, Kate K., Lucinda O., Marcia D.,
Robyn T., Sue N., Sylvia S.

Amy Rothstein
232-4156

HAIR DESIGN



Sept. 9, Sunday 10AM-Newsletter Brunch
for all those interested in
working on the next newsletter.
52 Browning Rd., Somerville
623-5443

Sept. 12, Wednesday 7:30-9:30 PM-Workshop
on Bisexuality with BAGLY (Boston
Area Gay/Lesbian Youth). St. Johns
Episcopal Church, Bowdoin St.
Boston.

Sept. 16, Sunday 6PM-BBWN BiPAC (Political
Action Committee). 52 Browning Rd.
Somerville. 623-5443

Sept. 22, Saturday Noon-March and Rally.
"Vote No to War-Build Peace and
Justice in 84" March meets noon @
Copley Sq., Waterfront Park and
Blackstone Park. Rally meets @ 2
@ Boston Common.

Sept. 23, Sunday 11-3PM.-Womens Center
Library Book Sale. Feminist Books.
46 Pleasant St., Central Sq., Camb.

Sept. 24, Monday 7:00PM.-GENERAL MEETING
BBWN. Somewhere Else, Franklin St.
Boston. "Bisexuality and Feminism"

Sept. 30, Sunday 11:00AM-Meeting to discuss
SECOND REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON
BISEXUALITY. Pot luck brunch. 52
Browning Rd., Somerville, 623-5443.
For all Women and men interested in
co-ordinating.

Sept. 30, Sunday 1-5PM.-Women's Center Open
House., 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge.

Sept. 30, Sunday 5PM. BBWN COORDINATING
COMMITTEE MEETING., Barb's House.
71 Paul Gore St., J.P. ALL MEMBERS
WELCOME!!

Oct. 3, Wednesday 7:00PM-BBWN presents
FALL DISCUSSION SERIES. Topic:
"Having Children". Somewhere Else.
Franklin St. Boston.

Oct. 5, HAPPY BIRTHDAY ROBYN

Oct. 15, Wednesday 7:30PM- Introduction to
Bisexuality and BBWN. Women's Center
3rd Floor., Central Sq., Camb.

Oct. 15, Deadline for Nov/Dec Newsletter
Submissions. Send to: BBWN, P.O.
BOX 1534, J.P.

ALLOWING OURSELVES PLEASURE



A TEN-WEEK SUPPORT GROUP FOR WOMEN

LED BY BECKY SHUSTER

"Becky and her group helped me understand and
feel powerful about my sexuality."

-L.R., Allston

"...one of the best things I've ever done for
myself"

-S.B., Cambridge

Allowing Ourselves Pleasure is a supportive
atmosphere to explore the messages about
sexuality which have hurt us and work to
recover a feeling of comfort in our bodies.
Through group discussion, personal thought,
and deliberate action, we will move toward
becoming able to experience full pleasure.

NEW GROUPS BEGIN THIS FALL.

LOW SLIDING SCALE FEE.

CALL 876-7433 FOR MORE INFORMATION

Coordinating Committee Meeting Minutes

CC Minutes: 7/29/84

Treasurer's report -- There is just over \$200 in the bank. The last newsletter cost \$115, \$104 was collected at the last general meeting, \$82 was received in donations.

The next general meeting will be held on a Monday, to accommodate women who cannot meet Wednesdays. It will be held at Somewhere Else on Sept. 24 at 7:00 to discuss Bisexuality and Feminism.

It was decided that dues will be collected annually, each September. Anyone who has paid within the last six months need not pay again until Sept. '85. All others need to renew immediately.

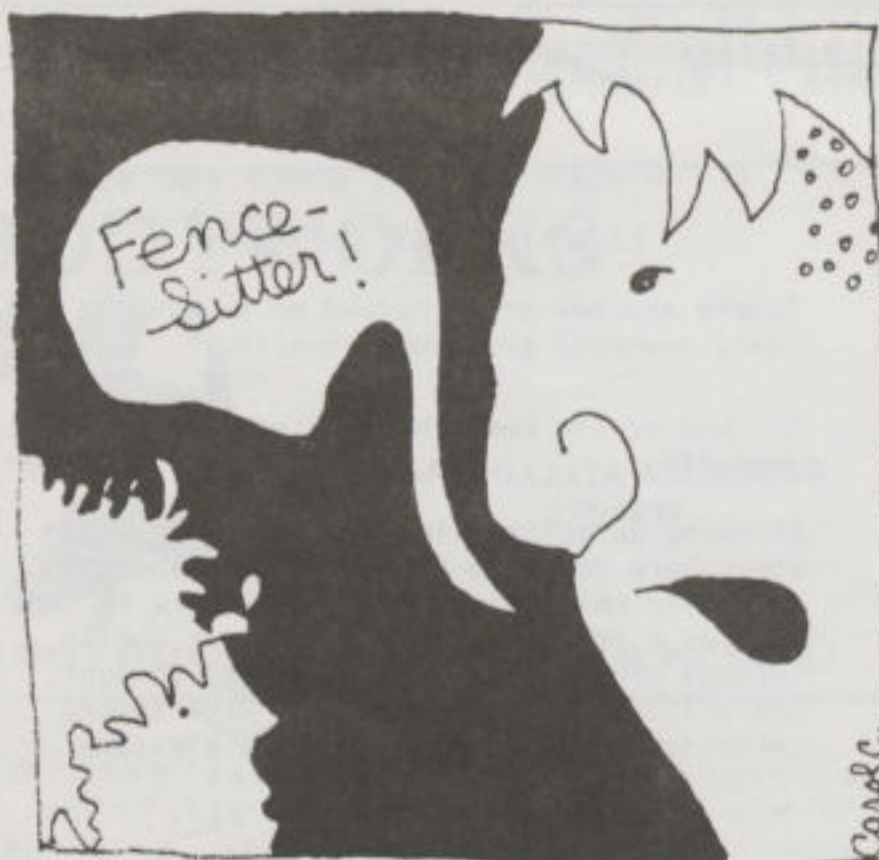
The charge for a newsletter ad is now \$6 for one issue or \$15 for three.

After considerable debate, it was decided that BBWN T-shirts will also be sold to men at the upcoming New Hampshire weekend retreat.

Strong feelings were voiced about the need for more BBWN political action. It was voted that BiPAC (Bisexual Political Action Committee) be formed, which will be a network subgroup that will initiate action approved by six voting Coordinating Committee members.

Since there is little sense of how many support groups meet regularly, Susan B. will be the coordinator of all the ongoing groups.

After lengthy discussion about the structure of our fall schedule, it was decided that there will be three separate, ongoing events: (1) every other month, an introduction to bisexuality held at The Women's Center to draw new members, (2) every other month, a general meeting for the entire network, opening with brief business announcements, followed by an in depth, topical discussions, new women welcome, (3) a lecture series open to the public, topics and schedule to be arranged.



FIGHT 'BI'SEXISM
IN EVERY NOOK AND CRANIUM!

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

The BBWN Coordinating Committee has decided that network membership dues need to start being collected on an annual basis. Membership dues are our only source of steady income. To simplify the process of bringing all present memberships to a September renewal date, it was decided that all dues paid before April 1984 will need to be renewed in September 1984. If you paid BBWN membership dues after April 1984, your membership will not expire until September 1985. If you are unsure as to when you paid, please make a donation to ensure your membership status. BBWN is a community, your community; please be a part of it.

Bi Conference

In March 1984, the Ad Hoc Regional Committee on Bisexuality held a day long conference in Hartford, Connecticut. The conference was such a success, it has been decided to have another one -- this time in Boston. Plans are beginning to be made for this event. Please see the Calendar section for the date and time of the first official meeting of the Planning Committee. Anyone interested is invited and urged to attend. Your ideas and insights are welcome, important, and needed. If you have been involved in any aspect of planning such an event, please come share your experience. If you have not, please come learn with the rest of us. This is a great opportunity to gain experience in a caring, supportive way.

BERNI ZISSERSON, A.C.S.W., L.I.C.S.W.
PSYCHOTHERAPIST

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continued from page 3

In this way, Dworkin advocates a cultural transformation that seeks to tear down the rigidity and oppression of the male/female model of human sexuality. As she says, "...we must refuse to submit to all forms of behavior which reinforce basic patterns of male dominance and female submission... and seek the development of a new society where natural desire is the foundation of community."

Susan Brownmiller begins in a very different place. In her book FEMININITY, she operates from the premise that male and female sexualities ARE polar opposites, and then proceeds to explore that aspect of femaleness we call femininity. "Femininity, in essence," Brownmiller states, "is a romantic sentiment, a nostalgic tradition of imposed limitations." She then chronicles the forms these imposed limitations have taken for women over the years -- skin, hair, eyes, and the necessary, continual occupation with beauty.

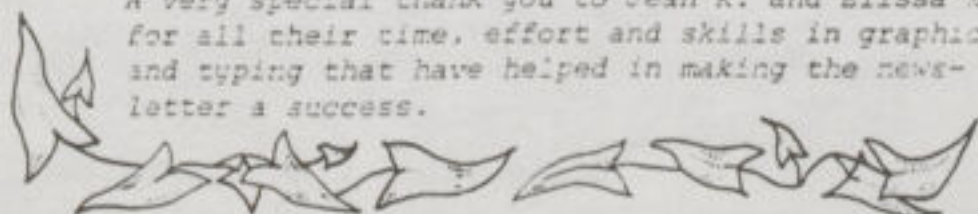
Although most of us in the group felt that Brownmiller was a little lighthearted about the whole thing, and that FEMININITY seemed to lack real radical feminist analysis, still her material was fascinating to us. We each began to more carefully consider this phenomenon of "femininity", how we each at different times had been master or slave to its complicated conventions, and how we each have understood instinctively from childhood how much and exactly when men expect it from us.

We decided, in fact, to go around the room and discuss our individual concessions to femininity -- concessions made in order to survive on the job, or get ahead, or simply because our conditioning was too deep to remove completely. The categories of our feminine trappings soon became clear. About half of us shaved our legs. About a third shaved our armpits. Very few, but still some, plucked their eyebrows. About half of us wore make-up. All of us wore flat-heeled shoes. An overwhelming majority of us wore some kind of jewelry. As we went around the circle, we laughed at our shared experiences of first bras, menstruation and all the other "feminine" aspects of womanhood our mothers so knowingly imparted to their daughters. As a springboard for further thought about so fundamental an aspect of womanhood, then, FEMININITY did have something to offer us.

The next meeting of the Study Group is August 29, 7:30 PM at Kate's. Everyone is welcome -- and the discussions are certainly worth the effort!

----- Barb H

A very special thank you to Jean K. and Elissa M. for all their time, effort and skills in graphics and typing that have helped in making the newsletter a success.



TELEPHONE (617) 498-9923

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COUNSELING, PSYCHOTHERAPY
CONSULTATION & TRAINING

14 PLEASANT ST.
CENTRAL SQUARE
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

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held throughout the day included discussion on the topics "Being Single and Bisexual," "Bearing Children," "Non-bisexual Lovers of Bisexuals," and "Couples." Also a spontaneous discussion was held among several of us women on the issue of how we personally choose to adjust our appearance to fit or not fit socially defined notions of femininity.

The discussions that I attended on Saturday were unanticipated delights. It was so wonderful to be with people who were willing to communicate so openly and sincerely. There was a very high level of trust present between people, which I found amazing given the diversity of our backgrounds and the fact that many of us did not previously know each other.

The informal gatherings throughout the day also served as times for people to get to know each other and become closer. Several of the retreat participants went to a local waterfall where we spent Saturday afternoon bathing nude and having interesting impromptu discussions. Saturday night we held a campfire and a sing along. People sat in front of the fire, talking and singing along to various folksongs from the 1960s. Betty and I indulged our feminist perspectives by including women's music in the songlist. Later that night Lesley directed a sweat lodge, where people enjoyed a native American cleansing and purification.

The retreat experience provided so many positive things for me and the other participants that I spoke to. It was educational as well as a source of nurturance and confirmation. There was present among the women particularly a strong support for feminist identification, which added to the comfort that I and many others felt on the weekend.

The retreat created a safe atmosphere, far away from city distractions, for men and women of many different lifestyles and self-definitions to come together and discuss issues relating to sexual options.

This retreat gave me a glimpse of what a future healthier world could be like. If we can create for one weekend an environment where people can be free from oppressive dictates regarding sex roles and sexual preferences, then there is hope for creating a more liberating world. That is what the weekend was all about for me.

----- Sue Mann

8 Political Action News

Political action was the topic addressed at the Gay Community Networking Breakfast in July. The first speakers were attorneys Holly Ladd and Fred Mandell. Each had volunteered their valuable time, skills and insights as legal consultants to those drafting Boston's Human Rights Ordinance. Having been signed into law on July 11 by Mayor Flynn, it prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, age, disability, national origin, sexual orientation and psychiatric, prisoner, military, marital and parental status. The lawyers explained that a seven member Human Rights Commission will be established to investigate all filed complaints. It will negotiate between the disputing parties and issue a conciliation agreement. If the violator does not comply, the Commission cannot levy a fine but the mayor-appointed Executive Director may suspend or revoke a city license. Already, the Salvation Army has threatened to ignore the new contract and is jeopardizing its city funding. They stressed that the imminent task before the gay community is to voice its input on the selection of the Commission's members.

The second speakers were the co-chairs of the Mass. Gay Political Caucus. They spoke briefly on the importance of working in the coming months for those candidates who have supported the Human Rights Ordinance Statewide. They also mentioned that they are working on a Community Organizing Day which will be a pre-election conference with speaker Giny Apuzzo, executive director of the national Gay Task Force.

At this breakfast, I sadly recognized how politically inactive BBWN is. Each group represented individuals who have donated their time, skills and energy in order to secure the Human Rights Ordinance. Their personal investment was impressive. Individually, many of us have supported lesbian/gay rights. But the time has come to work collectively, to introduce a bisexual voice into politics. BiPAC (Bisexual Political Action Committee) was formed at the last Coordinating Committee meeting to accomplish this. This group will exist solely to initiate actions which will have been approved by the Coordinating Committee. If you are interested in learning more about BiPAC or would like to get involved, come to our first meeting on Sept. 16, 6:00 at 52 Browning St., in Somerville, or call 497-0539.

-----Cathy J

Reader's Forum

Dear BBWN -

I'm responding to the letter signed, "Where Am I Safe?" in the last newsletter. I, too, have been thoroughly disgusted with the garbage that passes for music that is often played in women's bars. I never understood exactly why generic, indiscriminately chosen disco is the order of the day in women's bars with no heed paid to any lyrics that degrade women. I have come to the conclusion that disco is considered the only generally acceptable "dance" music in clubs where dancing is offered, and women are so inured to the stuff (and to the capitalist nature of many women's bars) that no one cares any more. Well, almost no one. I, for one, rarely frequent women's bars because the music sounds like it's being piped directly in from Women's World ("Exercise Salon.") I assure Holly, Meg, Chris, and Tret's music is not being played because it's not danceable. True enough, although some of it has to be lively enough to dance to, out of the wealth of available women's music. Another wonderful alternative -- try rock'n'roll. There's lot of marvelous, hip-shakin' ANTI-sexist rock'n'roll that many feminists are unaware of. Women who love to dance and are open to non-disco will love the Au Pairs, Siouxsie, the Delta 5, or the Passions, among others. Some local non-sexist bands include the Alpha Bettys, November Group, Vas Deferens, the Ironics, and (my humble band) Feminine Protection. Women who are interested in hearing some non-sexist rock'n'roll should keep their eyes peeled for these bands or contact Rock Against Sexism. R.A.S. wants to make Boston aware of sexism in rock'n'roll as well as to showcase local non-sexist bands and to agitate politically through direct action. Women who want info on R.A.S., Feminine Protection, or to pool resources on finding politically satisfying dance music can call me eves. at 734-1577. I hope women who feel sickened and degraded by misogynist lyrics in the women's bars, mixed bars, or radio stations will loudly and clearly let the management and DJs know exactly what we think of their insensitivity (at best) or woman-hatred. Imagine the effect if every angry woman complained! In sisterhood and struggle,

-----Liz N

Classified

New support group forming. Will possibly be meeting on Sunday evenings. Call Jean K. at (H)739-2963 or work-be discreet-437-1600 x310.

BE A GOOD BI GIRL! JOIN BBWN!!

The BBWN sends out nationally over 300 newsletters. At present this newsletter costs 47¢/copy or \$150.00 a mailing, not to mention the many hours of volunteer effort. Only about 1/3 of the women receiving it have paid dues. To those of you that have helped support the network, Thank You. To those who have not, please help.

Yes! Sign me up! I want to be a:
_Contributing Member (\$25)
_Regular Member (\$10)
_Truly needy member (\$5)
(make checks to BBWN) THANK YOU!

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/ZIP _____

PHONE _____



BBWN

November-December, 1984
Vol. 2, No. 6, P.O. Box 1534, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

The newsletter of The Boston Bisexual Women's Network

THE PATH TO BISEXUALITY: A STORY

PART 1

Age 13, 1971. I begin receiving strange looks from my classmates because I think I look good in men's ties. While the rest of the girls parade in micro-miniskirts I wear knee-length skirts and a shirt and tie to school. At this time I haven't heard of the word "lesbian," or "bisexual," I only feel more comfortable, more myself, sneaking my father's ties out of the closet and wearing them.

Age 14, 1972. For my fourteenth birthday I have a sleep-over party in the attic, which has a large brass bed and loads of play space. Two very close girlfriends, A. and B., are wrestling with each other. They are two thirds of our solid "three musketeers"; even so, I cannot join them, and feel very uncomfortable to the point where I avert my eyes. A. and B. are both straight; they are playing. I am asexual — afraid of physical closeness because of abuse in my past.

Age 15, 1973. I am afraid to sit behind men in buses and subways, and afraid to sit wherever they had been. My diagnostic shrink immediately prescribes Thorazine, which I take for four months until I tell my follow-up shrink that I feel I'd be better off without it. He agrees with me, and the medication is discontinued.

My mother notices two girls on my high school campus necking, and expresses distaste. I hadn't seen them, so didn't know what she was talking about. When I press her to explain, she says, "I just don't think two people should be like that in public, no matter what sex they are." She tells me a story about an experience she had while at sleep-away camp. She was 14, and shared a tent with "one of the most popular lesbians at Hunter College." She continued, "I felt so self-conscious about my body that I felt rejected because she didn't make a pass at me."

Age 16, 1974. My neighbor two doors down is getting remarried. C., a relative of the groom, is a classmate of mine. Her cousin, D., dressed in a lavender suit, wears a lambda around her neck. My first thought: "Well, either she's a student of Greek languages whose name begins with an L., or she's a lesbian." D. tells C. about her new lover and C. asks, "Who is she?" and my confusion is resolved. Inwardly I am thrilled; it is the first time I've been introduced to someone I knew was a lesbian. For me, it is like visiting another country.

continued on page 2

Study Group

The October 10th meeting of the BBWN study group discussed two chapters from The Second Stage by Betty Friedan. Ms. Friedan's basic premise is that the "first stage" of the women's movement -- gaining equality in the (male) world of the workplace -- has been sufficiently achieved by any women who now feel they have been "emotionally shortchanged" of their need for love and generation through the family. In the chapter "The Family as New Feminist Frontier," Ms. Friedan advances her theory that the "power and promise of the future lie in transcending the absolute separation of the sex roles, in work and family." While most of the group agreed with Ms. Friedan and acknowledged our own basic need for intimacy, shared concerns, and generation of the family, we felt her viewpoint to be firmly within the context of heterosexual, middle class America and therefore limited. First, we felt the majority of women are still feeling only the "trickle down" effect of the first stage and should not divert and dilute their energies from the fight for equality in the economic workplace (especially in the areas of benefits such as day care, flex time, maternity and paternity leave). And second, though she cites statistics stating that only 11% of American households are the "traditional" family (breadwinning father, housewife mother, and one or more children), Ms. Friedan has a thinly disguised nostalgia and yearning for a return to this model as a norm that the group, as bisexuals and feminists, could not support. A definition of the family that was more palatable to us was one proposed by the National Gay Task Force and the American Home Economic Association at the 1980 White House Conference on Families: "Two or more persons who share resources, share responsibilities for decisions, share values and goals, and have commitments to one another over time. The family is that climate that one 'comes home to', and it is this network of sharing and commitments that most accurately describes the family unit, regardless of blood, legal ties, marriage or adoption."

A lively discussion followed relating our personal feelings about women and the family to the context in which we came of age as feminists and bisexuals. One member of the study group was strongly influenced in college by a group of women

continued on page 6

NEXT GENERAL MEETING

Nov. 28, Wed., 7 p.m., Somewhere Else (Upstairs)
Topic: "The Dating Dilemma: Men and Bisexual Women"

NEXT COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING

Dec. 2, Sun. 4 p.m., Kate's House Info. 576-8612

continued from page 1

Age 17, 1975. I have a wonderful platonic relationship with E., a graduate student. He will be leaving for points distant after he gets his degree, but we become good friends. We had agreed on a platonic friendship after he had propositioned me and I refused.

After 2 1/2 years of psychotherapy, and using an alter-ego (who had been in my fantasies since early childhood), I overcome my terror of sex and realize that I have equal potential to love both men and women. I come out to F., a friend, who confides in me that she feels the same way...on a night when I'm typing a term paper for her and she's crashing in my dorm room. After coming out to each other we are immediately self-conscious, keeping our distance from each other for the rest of the night and giving each other looks that say, "Don't worry; I won't make a move!"

My shrink tells me that it's not hugs I need, it's sex. I don't believe him. He also tells me that my suspicions of having been sexually abused as a child could be wishes instead.

—Elissa M

End Part I

THE PATH TO BISEXUALITY: A STORY IN 3 PARTS PART 2

Age 18, 1976. I have an affair with a former professor, male. He is my first love, and a sexual and emotional breakthrough for me. We live together part time.

Age 19, 1977-78. The relationship with the professor, G., becomes stronger. At the same time I become involved with the Brooklyn Poets Union and while standing at their book table, I absently pick up a copy of Bulkin and Larkin's Amazon Poetry (Out & Out Books, 1975.) I become enmeshed in the poetry until I see the title page: "an anthology of lesbian poetry." The book almost drops from my hands; I suddenly feel as though by lifting the book I have become marked. I quickly replace the book on the table. Several weeks later I unconsciously pick up the book, remembering that I'd liked it, not remembering why I didn't buy it, and buy it. Sitting in my parents' house I notice the title page again, and shiver and rejoice at once.

In August 1978 G. and I become engaged. In my diary on the day I became engaged, 8/24, I wrote, "I remember a diary I had destroyed after I had lost my virginity, where I stated that I shouldn't lose G.'s respect, and where I tried to outline where our relationship would lead. Then, in a later diary, came my emotional reactions to things he did and said, and the hope of marrying him — a sort of seesaw between marriage and lesbianism/bisexuality." Less than a month later, on 9/21, I wrote, "...while most times I am excited, there are times — when all this piles up — when I feel as though I am signing my life away before my time."

At the same time I am engaged, my alter-ego in fantasy enters into a lesbian relationship. The relationship ends in a power-play where my alter ego — who has supernatural powers — transforms herself into a man after losing her lover.

I break off relations with my platonic friend, E., feeling as though I didn't have a choice by staying with G. To this day, it is the only break-up that I still regret.

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THE MONDALE/FERRARO FUNDRAISER - RADICAL POLITICS?

Finally it was October 12, 8:30 p.m. From the street, the purple, blue and red balloons and the Mondale/Ferraro signs made the studio at 354 A Cambridge St. look like a small campaign headquarters — but not radical politics.

Inside one found soft lights, wine, beer, chips and veggies and dip, cider — hot and cold — music and dancing. The idea of having a Mondale/Ferraro Fundraiser for BBWN members (first voiced at the BBWN Beach Party in August) had survived the necessary discussions, planning and organizing. The importance of getting RR out of the White House had kept us going — but was that radical politics?

It was our guest speaker, Boston City Councilman David Scondras, from the Gay Community, who made it very clear that supporting Mondale and Ferraro in 1984 is radical politics. Scondras pointed out that Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians, Blacks, Hispanics and all others of the human rights coalition are the only ones that "can save the planet from itself, as the rest are tied into the status quo." he said that the energy to improve conditions comes from the members of this coalition, "who are not married to things the way they are." With Mondale/Ferraro we have a chance of working for those changes that we want. The alternative — a President who preaches the rights of the straight, rich, white patriarchy.

Scondras illustrated the probable future if Reagan wins. With trillions more planned for arms and an already immense deficit, economic chaos is imminent. As has happened before in our country, as happened in Nazi Germany, those outside the mainstream will be used as the scapegoats. The chance of making the kind of future the human rights coalition wants would be crushed. And thus in 1984, support of Mondale/Ferraro becomes radical politics.

By 1:30 a.m. or so the Fundraiser was over but the work we all need to do continues...in '84 it is called radical politics!

-----Joanna A



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A JOURNAL OF WOMAN-TO-WOMAN S/M

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Update on the Central America Referendum Campaign

Did you know you will have the opportunity to vote for peace in Central America on November 6th? Thanks to the work of hundreds of volunteers, the Central America referendum is on the ballot in 39 state rep. districts in Massachusetts — the largest referendum of this kind in the United States. The referendum calls for withdrawal of troops and advisors from El Salvador and Honduras, ending military aid to El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and the contra forces fighting to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and redirecting those funds to create jobs and improve services in the U.S.

The many campaign activities include informal house meetings, tabling in busy areas, passing out literature at MBTA stops, canvassing neighborhoods, sponsoring fund-raising parties, and phonebanking. The campaign still needs volunteers and/or money! If you can help out on election day or sooner please call Kate Keegan at 576-2455 or the main office at 247-1577.

Nov. 6, Tues. VOTE!! MONDALE/FERRARO!

Nov. 7, Wed. 7 p.m. BISEXUAL DISCUSSION SERIES: "Pornography and Erotica." New Words Bookstore - 186 Hampshire St., Cambridge, Info: 576-8612.

Nov. 7, Wed. 8 a.m. GAY/LESBIAN COMMUNITY NETWORK BREAKFAST. BBWN Speaker. Club Cafe. Berkeley & Columbus Ave., Boston.

Nov. 9, Fri. 7 p.m. LESBIAN & GAY COMMUNITY RECOGNITION DINNER sponsored by Boston Lesbian & Gay Political Alliance - China Pearl Restaurant, 9 Tyler St., Chinatown. \$20. Info, call 247-3910.

Nov. 13, Tues. 7 p.m. BISEXUAL STUDY GROUP. Leslie's. Info, call 492-8001.

Nov. 15, Thurs. Lecture - Caffeinism: The Hidden Drug Addiction. 93 Union St., Newton Center. Info: 965-3306.

Nov. 26, Mon. Lecture - Women's Health Forum: "Cancer." 7-9 p.m. Info: 267-7593.

Nov. 28, Wed. 7 p.m. BBWN GENERAL MEETING. Somewhere Else (Upstairs). Topic: "The Dating Dilemma: Men and Bisexual Women." BE THERE!

Dec. 2, Sun. 4 p.m. BBWN COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING - Kate's - Info: 576-8612.

Dec. 5, Wed. 7 p.m. BISEXUAL DISCUSSION SERIES: "Classism and Racism" - Somewhere Else, 295 Franklin Street, Boston. Info: 576-8612.

Dec. 10, Mon. 7:30 p.m. INTRODUCTORY ON BISEXUALITY. The Women's Center. Pleasant Street, Cambridge.

Dec. 15 - DEADLINE FOR NETWORK MATERIAL

Dec. 16, Sun. - SOMERVILLE/MEDFORD GAY AND LESBIAN ALLIANCE sponsors HOLIDAY BALL at the Randolph Country Club. Info. call Bob 628-5875 or Helene 625-3172.

M.A.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT: MEETINGS ANONYMOUS (MA)
Do meetings affect your social life?? Calendar booked thru '85? Can't stop yourself? If so, it may be time to join MEETINGS ANONYMOUS.

The first meeting will not be held Nov. 11 at 6 a.m.

The second meeting will not be held Dec. 14 at 2:30 a.m.

DARE NOT ATTEND. MA can help!



TAMARA BOWER

2ND BISEXUAL CONFERENCE

The first planning committee meeting for the 2nd Regional Conference on Bisexuality was held on October 2nd. 11 members of the BBWN gathered to discuss the logistics and purpose/theme of the conference. The event will be held in Boston in March 1985. It will follow a format similar to the Hartford conference with discussion workshops, craft and information booths, etc. We also hope to organize evening events for this year's conference to allow for an extended and informal time for those attending the conference to socialize.

A pre-registration form will be mailed out in November to determine interest in the conference and workshop topics. As the time for this event nears, there will be a lot of work to be done. Being part of such a planning effort is a great way to get to know other BBWN and BBMN people, contribute to something that is very important in all our lives, and to have a lot of fun! So please let us know if you're interested in helping out and/or have any ideas, resources, etc. Please contact Robyn O. (623-5443) or Terry M. (625-8397) with questions or comments about the conference.

PLEASE HELP OUT!

BODYWORKS



MARGARITA ASCENCIO
576-1493

53 RIVER STREET, CAMBRIDGE, NR CENTRAL SQUARE (T)

FERRARO!



In a previous issue of a BBWN newsletter, we launched Bi-The-Way, which provides readers with a space to send in your personal questions, dilemmas, resource searches and puzzles of life. Our therapist consultant, Bet MacArthur, LICSW, is a psychotherapist in Cambridge. Please take a risk and send in your questions for all of us to learn from.

Letter said:

Basically i'm writing because I'm feeling real alone and I've done a pretty good job of isolating myself.

I've been out as a lesbian for almost 10 years, coming out was not too devastating; perhaps because I felt very good about my choice and I had a supportive network. So the rejections I had -- and they were there! -- were not unbearable.

But here I find that there's a new part of me wanting to come out and I'm petrified! Not at what people will think as much as by -- what am I going to do?! I see there being no peace for me in a bisexual lifestyle -- wanting very much to lay back in the stability and safety of a relationship and feeling like that will never happen. I feel very guilty for what I'm putting my woman lover through right now. We've been together for over 2 years and we live together. I know having an open relationship will not work for her (she's told me as much) and I'm not even sure that's what I want. I feel scared and real sad right now. I guess I'm writing because I saw your ad in *Sojourner* on one of my sojourns to Cambridge and felt like I had to do something. Is there any literature -- anything available that speaks to this issue? Help.

RESPONSE: Among humans, social isolation intensifies all stress: medical illness as well as emotional and spiritual disturbances. Certainly, change is a stressor. You are isolated, and now you are also changing. The fear you mention often in your letter appears from the context to be the fear of change itself; but without the willingness to feel that fear, change will be restricted. You may not be changing from lesbian to bisexual identification, but some kind of change appears to be on its way - in your relationship, in your priorities, or (I hope) in your state of relative isolation. First off, you need support, to explore your wishes safely without having to act. Second, you need to review the causes of your isolation and also review your relationship and its potential for intimacy; explore whether you are changing so much that it cannot be maintained.

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Sat./Sun
brunch

MODERN TIMES
CAFE

354-8371

Health care. The necessary yearly (or twice yearly, for some of us) gyn exams and pap smears. "Are you using birth control?" "Yes." "No, I don't need it right now." "Yes, I'm in a lesbian relationship." "No, I'm in a lesbian relationship."

Where do you go for health care? Realizing that it was nearing time for another visit, I debated: Do I call the holistic health practitioner that I last saw? The one who advertises in *Sojourner* but who refrained from pursuing questioning when told, "I'm not using any birth control." Or do I return to my neighborhood health clinic, knowing the only gyn doctors on staff are male? Or yet another option: Do I call a lesbian/gay oriented health clinic, knowing that I possibly may need birth control services in the future?

I wanted, as much as possible, to keep my gyn health care consolidated. As I pondered this dilemma, I realized that health care is yet another area where the needs of bisexual women must be introduced. Part of this means speaking up and addressing homophobia in heterosexually-oriented clinics and coming out to practitioners providing lesbian/gay health services. In doing so, health providers can give us the best care possible, knowing our needs which span the range from birth control to other female/male sexual issues to lesbian health issues.

—Sal

Bisexuality in a Psychiatric Setting

Our social service institutions seem to grow more and more tolerant of homosexuality all the time. Surprisingly, bisexuals have landed a harsher diagnosis in the facility in which I work. In reading the evaluations of several bisexual patients, I noticed such subjective statements as "she is having difficulty deciding," and "she doesn't know what she is." A diagnosis of 'sexual identity disorder, undifferentiated' was given to two patients, along with other psychiatric terms. Nowhere were the words of the patient quoted, for if they had stated sexual identity as one of their problems, I'd consider it valid information to be passed on. In the charts of gay patients, I have seen no such subjectivity or labeling. I asked a co-worker, aged 20, what she thought of such disorders to which she stated: "For an 18 year old, it really isn't so serious, but for those in their 20's or 30's, it's really sad. If someone hasn't figured out what they are, straight or gay, by the time they are twenty years old, they've really got a problem!" So much for enlightenment.

—Wendy Z



NEEDED: EDITORS AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS TO WORK ON THE NEXT NEWSLETTER. PLEASE CALL CHARNAN OR ROBYN AT 623-5443 IF INTERESTED.

NEWSLETTER STAFF: Charnan B, editor, Lucinda O, Stephanie, assistants, Elissa M, typist, Jean K, graphics.

TELEPHONE (617) 498-9923

BET MACARTHUR, ACSW LICSW
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Bi-Girls at the 1984 Gay Pride March

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6 Discussion Series

The BBWN fall discussion series began on October 3, with nine women gathering at Somewhere Else to talk about "Having Children." Of the group, one of us was a mother, some had strong desires to become parents, and others were ambivalent. We ranged in age from 23 to 25. The organizers of the series, Ellen W., Becky S. and Magee H., had prepared a series of thought-provoking questions for us to consider.

None of the participants envisioned or were raising children in a traditional, isolated heterosexual nuclear family. There was a clear recognition that this "norm" is no longer the norm even for women who expect and want it. But a common theme of the evening was a sense of realism about the difficulties and the energy involved in raising children: no one wanted to do it alone. While marriage might not be in our plans, no one was prepared to bring up children without other important adults in our and their lives. Quite a few women were aware of "the biological clock ticking" - realizing that if they wanted to give birth to a child they couldn't necessarily wait for the perfect time, or the perfect love relationship with a man or woman who wanted to co-parent. Some women felt they would not choose children unless they had a permanent, stable relationship with a partner. Others imagined scenarios in which they were "single parents," but sharing childcare with extended family, friends and others.

The visions of alternative families were varied, with much discussion centered on the pros and cons of different arrangements. One of the most unusual ideas was to establish a child-rearing partnership with a man (possibly a bisexual or gay man) who might be the biological father of a woman's child, but not her lover. In effect the two people would start out "divorced," but joined in their commitment to the child. They would share the financial burden of child-rearing and ensure that the child always had two loving adult caretakers - giving her or him more stability than many children of traditional marriages who divorce.

Many women had considered raising a child with a female lover. A few of us were beginning to find role models in lesbian friends who had recently chosen to become co-parents. People were apprehensive about the difficulties of two women co-parenting a family in a homophobic society - yet often it seemed easier to imagine sharing parenting responsibilities equally and comfortably with another woman. One woman mentioned her concern about raising a boy within the women's community; for example, she saw the segregation of boys from the main areas of the New England Women's Musical Retreat as unfair. Would boys experiencing this kind of treatment become self-hating, and/or angry at women so that they become a new generation of the oppressors we've been trying to escape? Some other group members felt that the women's community is changing, and attitudes toward boy children are becoming less negative. In general, the group felt that for either a boy or a girl child living in a women's household, it would be important for the child to have a good relationship with an adult male who could be a positive model.



Schedule:

The fall discussion series will continue on Wed., November 7 at 7 p.m., with the topic to be "Pornography and Erotica." The November 7 meeting will take place in the basement of New Words Bookstore, 186 Hampshire St. in Cambridge. The series will end with a discussion on "Classism and Racism" at 7 p.m. on Wed. December 5, to be held at Somewhere Else, on the second floor, 295 Franklin St., Boston. All Women are welcome to join one or both of the discussions. For more information call 576-8612.

-----Carole S

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who lived together in emotional support and of commitment to "female" qualities of nurturance and relationships. And "male" characteristics such as ambition, intellectualism, or competition, were strongly discouraged. The family was thought of as groups of women living together with children. At the other end of the spectrum, another member of the study group was strongly influenced by her peer group to achieve in all the traditional male ways -- business or graduate school as a way up the career ladder. Getting married and having children was seen as a betrayal of feminist ideals. In both cases, the women both felt a stifling of their choices -- choices to be with men, choices to have children or not, choices in how to exercise their intellect and "femaleness" as they defined it. Indeed the choice for many women concerning the family has been at least clouded if not stifled, not only by feminists but also by "pro-lifers," men, and economics. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to women having the freedom to choose to have children and a family is one that Ms. Friedan only touches on lightly: "But part of the conflict is realistic: the price of motherhood is still too high for most women; the stunting of abilities and earning power is a real fear, because professions and careers ((and men's attitudes)) are still structured in terms of the lives of men whose wives took care of the parenting, housework, and other details of life." Women should not be penalized emotionally, intellectually, socially, or economically for choosing to build families.

-----Blake W

Amy Rothstein
232-4156

HAIR DESIGN



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G. and I are married on August 5, 1979.

Age 22, May 1981. I join the Feminist Writers' Guild, as a way to get out of the house. My masters education is winding down, and G. is pressing me to have children. He prefers a son. Feeling as though pregnancy is a requirement I stop using birth control at first. We are involved in a co-op fight, and G. becomes violent.

August 1981. When I say no, G. pins me to the bed and rapes me — for purposes of procreation. I feel like a caged animal, and flee to H., with the excuse that I need to help her nurse her pinched nerve. I stay with her for three days, furious, unbelieving, and heartbroken. On my way back to G. I stop in a women's bookstore in Greenwich Village and buy Women's Networks (Carol Kleiman, Ballantine Books, 1980) and, with great pride, the enlarged version of Amazon Poetry: Bulkin and Larkin's Lesbian Poetry (Persephone Press, 1981.)

When I confront G. with what he had done, he apologizes and in the same sentence replies — deadpan — that when he is involved in a fight I should understand that everyone is his enemy...including me.

-----Elissa M

End Part II

I join a peer poetry workshop in the Feminist Writers' Guild, and begin working for Women Strike for Peace as well as do volunteer work for the Women's Pentagon Action. It is here that I meet lesbians who have come out. By this time I have fully recognized the lesbian aspect in me.

November 1981. My mother becomes ill, and I make the first of four emergency flights to Florida in the space of seven months.

Fall 1981 through 1982. I use a diaphragm secretly, and G. is not the type of person to detect its presence. I second-guess as to when he will want to "take" me, which comes once per month, perhaps once every other month, when he "thinks" I'm fertile. My menstrual cycle is between 28 and 40 days. Spiriting my paycheck away when I can, I open up a secret bank account that I call my "abortion money" should I need to use it.

I tell G. that I view myself as bisexual. He says, "Does that mean I have to feel jealous when you look at women as well as when you look at men?" and I say, "Yep."

Age 23, April 1982. I visit my parents, now living in Florida. I mention to my mother that I have seen the potential in myself for a lesbian relationship. Without blinking an eyelash, she replies, "Doesn't every woman?"

July 14, 1982. My mother dies, two weeks after losing her right leg to diabetes. My husband G. does not attend the funeral.

Age 24, October 1982. I coordinate a poetry reading given by my workshop at the Gay Women's Alternative in New York City. I write a lesbian love scene, which I read to the workshop. I., a lesbian with a history of a straight marriage, the birth of a daughter, divorce and a return to lesbianism, shakes her head and says, "Damn it, Elissa, why do you have to be straight?" Half-seriously, I joke, "It's just a phase I'm going through."

H., whom I stayed with after I was raped, confides in me that she feels there's something wrong with her because she is straight. I assure her that whatever is natural for her is right, and confess that I am physically and

sexually attracted to her. She tells me, "If I ever change my mind I'll take you up on it!"

G. pulls a saber on two insurance salesmen, convinced that they are "spies" sent by the co-op sponsors. When I step between him and the salesmen and demand that he put the saber away, he threatens to run it through me.

November 1982. My blood pressure, taken by an internist, shows 130 over 100. Part of my "abortion money" pays for the visit; G. insists that I "don't need a doctor," but receives the insurance money for my expenses.

January 1983. G. drags me through the front window. In the following week I pack whatever I can and stash my belongings with a neighbor. On the last day of January I leave.

February 1983. Two days after I have left G., my blood pressure measures 116 over 78. I spend the month homeless, staying in H.'s parents' house, staying with friends from the poetry workshop, hanging out in libraries and hotel lobbies, sleeping in a college lounge. One morning I dream that I am strangling G. and feel utterly fantastic, but upon awakening it takes me several seconds to figure out where I am.

At a poetry benefit I meet J., a photographer whom I met through Women Strike for Peace. She asks, "Does this mean you're coming out?" Exhausted from my ordeal, I debate saying, "The last thing I came out of was a window." I explain to her that I viewed myself as potentially bisexual since I was 17. She says, "You always were confusing."

I get in touch with A., my friend of over a dozen years (see Age 13, 1971), who is ready to move from Boston to Los Angeles, just at the time when I need a place to live. I rush up to Boston, fall in love with her place and sign a lease. Over the following months I am in the process of moving, getting clothes on my back, getting furniture, and getting a job.

March 1983. I come out to two sets of relatives. One set rejoices and congratulates me. The other tells me to keep my mouth shut about it.

April 1983. My father sends me an abusive letter insinuating, among other things, that I never loved my mother. I break all communication with him.

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CLASSIFIED AD:

New support group forming for lesbian-identified women. Please call 738-4306 on Mon. or Weds. evenings and leave a message if answering machine is on.



BETH WALSH

MASSAGE POLARITY

576-1493

(617) 623-7258



\$\$ Support your network! \$\$



continued from page 7

H. spends three weeks with me, during which time I show her my journal. While reading of my suspicions that my father had sexually abused me, she drops Moo Shi Chicken all over my rug. Later on, we share a bottle of burgundy while laughing our heads off over Star Trek. The sexual attraction I've felt toward her peaks. As we become closer she asks me what I want and I say, "Right now, I want to take you into my arms and kiss you." In the minutes that follow I become convinced that I am indeed bisexual — but she realizes that she is indeed straight.

September 1983. I go to a convention and fall into bed with K. I make it clear at the outset that I am bisexual. He says, "I think that's very natural for women. I could marry a bisexual..." All my red flags go up at once.

In a phone call to A., she says, "Well you told me you're bisexual! When are you going to find a woman?"

October 1983. At the approach of my 25th birthday, I begin to get flashbacks.

December 1983. I attend "I Never Told Anyone," a workshop given by Ellen Bass for women survivors of child sexual abuse. On the Winter Solstice I have a tubal ligation done.

January 1984. L., a member of the newly formed support group that was an outgrowth of "I Never Told Anyone," introduces me to the BBWN.

April 1984. Dancing in Somewhere Else, I meet M. and come out to her. She says, "You're really brave to come out just like that. I know we lesbians are persecuted, but it must be worse for you...do you ever think you'll become fully gay?"

May 1984. I overhear a conversation between two co-workers, N. and O., both of whom are women. N. expresses her shock at a male friend of hers who has just come out. "If only he'd have told me in the beginning, I wouldn't be this shocked," she says. I've worked with N. and O. for over a year, and suddenly feel very conspicuous. I almost say, "Guess what...?"

June 1984. Dining out with N. and O., the subject of homosexuality and bisexuality come up. N. says she's never met a bisexual. I say, "Do you remember that word processing I've been doing? It's for the Boston Bisexual Women's Network." O. says, "How'd you hear about that?" and I reply, "I'm a member." N. looks me straight in the eye and says, "I'm not a bit surprised." O. asks me to explain the difference between men and women. All I can say is, "It's like comparing apples and oranges...you can't. It's very individual." My sexual experience — two men, one woman — is not as powerful as my spiritual experience in these matters. But my alter-ego is a woman once again.

—Elissa M

BE A GOOD BI GIRL!

JOIN BBWN!!

The BBWN sends out nationally over 300 newsletters. At present this newsletter costs 47¢/copy or \$150.00 a mailing, not to mention the many hours of volunteer effort. Only about 1/3 of the women receiving it have paid dues. To those of you that have helped support the network, Thank You. To those who have not, please help.

Yes! Sign me up! I want to be a:

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